Revelation Realized

Martyr Vindication from Genesis to Revelation

"The Destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem" by Nicholas Poussin, 1637

Samuel G. Dawson

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"Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near." (Revelation 1.3)

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Before You Read This Introductory Chapter

If you are not familiar with the author's material on the theme of imminent judgment in the New Testament (from the author's *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things*, or his *The Teaching of Jesus: from Sinai to Gehenna, A Faithful Jewish Rabbi Urgently Warns Rebellious Israel*), it is highly recommended that you read the first three appendices of this book. Appendix 1 establishes the theme of imminent judgment in the gospels, Appendix 2 establishes the theme of imminent judgment in the Olivet Discourse, and Appendix 3 establishes the theme of imminent judgment in Acts through Revelation. With that background, you will be much better equipped to easily comprehend the rest of this book, as it builds on that theme of imminent judgment in the New Testament. As a matter of fact, it is the culmination of it.

Thanks for reading, and considering,

Samuel G. Dawson

Introduction

The Theme of Revelation

The introduction to the book of Revelation in this volume will be somewhat different from typical books of this type. Most who read this volume will already be aware that there are two schools of thought as to when Revelation was written: the *early date* is before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and the *late date* is taken to be in the mid-90s of the first century AD.

The approach in this volume will be to develop the theme of martyr vindication in Revelation as the climax of the theme from the first pages of the Bible to the last. From that theme we will understand inescapably that the book was written shortly before AD 70 and Jerusalem's destruction at the hands of the Roman General Titus.

The Bible Doctrine of Martyr Vindication

This essay examines a doctrine displayed in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation; yet, its far-reaching and remarkable consequences have hardly been affirmed or considered. The doctrine, simply stated, is that God takes into account the martyrdom of his faithful ones, and has taken steps to avenge their shed blood. This theme arises very early in the Bible, with a murder in the first family.

The Murder of Abel

In Genesis 4, we have the account of two of Adam's sons, Cain and Abel, making their sacrifices to God, who accepted faithful Abel's offering, but not Cain's. As a result, in 4.8, Cain slew his brother. When God asked Cain of Abel's whereabouts, he infamously lied and answered: "I know not. Am I my brother's keeper?" God's response (in 4.10) was:

> And He said, What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground.

Of course, Abel's blood wasn't literally making any sound whatsoever. God merely pointed out that the unjust pouring out of Abel's blood demanded Cain's punishment. In Gen. 9.5-6, God based his demand for capital punishment on avenging the blood of the one murdered when he said:

> 5 And surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. 6 Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.

In my years of preaching and debating as a young minister, I recall in Spokane, Washington being invited to debate the subject of capital punishment by a highly regarded lady talk show host. Some prominent country-western singer had caused quite a stir in Eastern Washington by leading a protest against capital punishment at the state penitentiary at Walla Walla. Spokane was a very conservative city of about 200,000, and this lady's audience was demanding the radio station management have someone affirming capital punishment come in and debate the subject with her. Since I had an extremely popular live call-in radio program every weekday morning on the same station, the manager asked me to participate in the debate. This manager, a Jewish lady, was a good friend of mine, and we had discussed many Old Testament topics over the years, especially capital punishment, which she detested, although I constantly reminded her that it was in "her part of the Bible." Although she didn't agree with the Bible or me on the subject, she wanted me to defend it on this lady's program.

In the course of the debate, the listening audience was permitted to call in and question both speakers. At one point, someone called in to disagree with my use of this very passage as the basis of capital punishment and said, "Sam, I thought we had progressed beyond the torture stake, and the rack." I responded by saying, "Oh, I'm sorry if I've given anyone the impression that I believed in torturing murderers. God didn't say torture them, he said kill them!"

The lady on the other side of the issue was shocked at my statement and looked at me incredulously, saying, "You're serious about this, aren't you?" I replied, "I've never been more serious in my life!" and went ahead to point out that the basis for capital punishment was

that man was created in the image of God. If man were just another animal, it was no big deal if he killed someone, but because God created man in his image, he meant for man to hold his fellow man's life as sacred, and that capital punishment was instituted out of respect for life!

For our purposes here, we merely note the beginning of the concept of avenging innocent blood, and especially that of God's martyrs.

In Mt. 23.29-36, just before Jesus walked out of the temple for the last time in his life, he mentions Abel in this context:

> 29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and garnish the tombs of the righteous, 30 and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. 31 Wherefore ye witness to yourselves, that ye are sons of them that slew the prophets. 32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. 33 Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell? 34 Therefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: some of them shall ye kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city: 35 that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous unto the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar. 36 Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

Since Jesus mentioned Abel in his teaching concerning the vindication of martyrs, we began our study of this subject where he did, with the martyrdom of faithful Abel.

Martyr Vindication in the Song of Moses

We now want to notice an extremely important chapter with reference to the messiah's judgment of Israel, Deuteronomy 32, the Song of Moses. With the aid of several student friends, I've recently come to the conclusion that Deuteronomy 32 may indeed be the most important chapter of the Bible, yet hardly anyone reads it or appreciates the significance of it. I've taught the entire Old Testament through five or six

times, yet previously I've missed the importance of this chapter. It's no exaggeration to say that Deuteronomy 32 is the basis of the teachings of the Old Testament prophets, as well as the teaching of John the Baptist, Jesus, and his apostles throughout the New Testament.

We began our study of God's foretelling of Old Covenant Israel's end from its beginning by noticing a characteristic of the true God versus idols. In Isa. 46.5-7, God compares himself with idols:

> 5 To whom would you liken Me, And make Me equal and compare Me, That we should be alike? 6 Those who lavish gold from the purse And weigh silver on the scale Hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; They bow down, indeed they worship it. 7 They lift it upon the shoulder and carry it; They set it in its place and it stands there. It does not move from its place. Though one may cry to it, it cannot answer; It cannot deliver him from his distress.

This is an accurate description of man-made gods. They can't talk, they can't walk, and since they can't stand on their own, they have to be nailed down so they won't fall over. In vv9-10, God further says:

> 9 Remember the former things long past. For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, 10 *Declaring the end from the beginning* And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure;

Notice in particular that the true God is the one who can declare the end of a matter from its beginning. We now want to notice that God declares the end of Old Covenant Israel from its national beginning, particularly in Deuteronomy 32.

Just before Moses' death, after he led the first generation of Jews out of Egypt and through the wilderness of Sinai, he brought them to the border of their promised land. In Deuteronomy 28-30, he pronounces all the blessings Israel will receive if they remain faithful to God, and all the curses they will receive if they are unfaithful. In Dt. 31.19-21, God instructs Moses to write a song, the Song of Moses, and teach it to Israel:

> 19 Now therefore, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it on their lips, in or-

> der that this song may be a witness for Me against the sons of Israel. 20 For when I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and are satisfied and become prosperous, then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and spurn Me and break My covenant. 21 Then it shall come about, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify before them as a witness (for it shall not be forgotten from the lips of their descendants); for I know their intent which they are developing today, before I have brought them into the land which I swore.

In Dt. 32.5, Moses said, "They have acted corruptly toward Him, They are not His children, because of their defect; But are a perverse and crooked generation."

This isn't referring to the current generation on the verge of entering their promised land, but Israel's last generation, as we'll soon see. In Dt. 32.7, Moses said, "Remember the days of old, Consider the years of all generations. Ask your father, and he will inform you, Your elders, and they will tell you." Again, this wasn't speaking of Moses' current generation, for Israel hadn't even existed for many generations, and the nation had as yet no "days of old". Moses foretold that would happen to the wicked and perverse generation at Old Covenant Israel's end.

In Dt. 31.29, Moses told Israel:

> For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands.

Moses tells them that punishments from God will befall them "in the latter days," i.e., in their future, because of their involvement with false gods. This would include a variety of punishments, including the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. However, in Dt. 32.20-21, Moses becomes much more specific, foretelling the very end of the nation of Old Covenant Israel:

> 20 Then He said, I will hide My face from them, I will see what *their end* shall be; For they are *a perverse*

> *generation*, Sons in whom is no faithfulness. 21 They have made Me jealous with what is not God; They have provoked Me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation

God now foretells "the end" of Old Covenant Israel, that their last generation will be a perverse generation. Jesus, of course, called his generation of Jews an "unbelieving and perverse generation" in Mt. 16.4 and 17.17, and in the first gospel sermon, Peter called faithful Jews to "save yourselves from this perverse generation" (Ac. 2.40).

We can know that the generation of Jesus and Peter is the one under consideration in Deuteronomy 32 since Paul quotes Dt. 32.21 in Rom. 10.19 as justification for his taking the gospel to the Gentiles in an attempt to provoke the Jews to jealousy. This was in the early 60s AD, shortly before the end of Old Covenant Israel in AD 70.

Continuing in Dt. 32.28-29, we read:

> 28 They are a nation without sense, there is no discernment in them. 29 If only they were wise and would understand this and discern what their end will be! (NIV)

Thus, "the end" of Old Covenant Israel was foretold at their beginning in Sinai, verifying that the true God is faithfully called the one who foretells a matter's end from its beginning, in this case, sixteen centuries before!

Deuteronomy 32 and Revelation

Dt. 32.30-33 gives an important key to interpreting the book of Revelation:

> How could one chase a thousand, And two put ten thousand to flight, Unless their Rock had sold them, And the LORD had given them up? 31 Indeed their rock is not like our Rock, Even our enemies themselves judge this. 32 For their vine is from the vine of Sodom, And from the fields of Gomorrah; Their grapes are grapes of poison, Their clusters, bitter. 33 Their wine is the venom of serpents, And the deadly poison of cobras.

It's interesting that in the Bible, God doesn't call any city Sodom (besides the literal Sodom) besides Jerusalem, and it's surprising how many times she is called by that name. For example, in Isa. 1.9-10, Jerusalem is called Sodom:

> 9 Unless the LORD of hosts Had left us a few survivors, We would be like Sodom, We would be like Gomorrah. 10 Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah.

Likewise, Jer. 23.14 is another example of Jerusalem being referred to as Sodom and Gomorrah:

> Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: The committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; And they strengthen the hands of evildoers, So that no one has turned back from his wickedness. *All of them have become to Me like Sodom*, And her inhabitants like Gomorrah.

Please see another example in Ezek. 16.47-48.

In Revelation, we find the theme of two cities: Babylon, the great harlot city which is destroyed, and New Jerusalem, which replaces it as the faithful wife of God. One might suspect that Babylon is Old Covenant Jerusalem since New Jerusalem replaces it, but we won't have to rely on suspicion. In Gal. 4.21ff, Paul gives the allegory of Hagar and Sara. These women represented two covenants (the Mosaic Covenant and Christ's new covenant), two peoples (old and new covenant Israel), and two cities (old and new covenant Jerusalem). Hagar represented "the Jerusalem that now is and is in bondage with her children" (v. 25), "but the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother" (v. 26). This is Paul's version of "the tale of two cities." In Heb. 12.18-23, written to Jewish Christians, the author contrasts two mountains (Sinai and Zion) and two cities (earthly and heavenly or Old and New Covenant Jerusalem). We see the same comparison in Revelation. In Rev. 11.8, we have:

> 8 And their dead bodies lie in the street of the great (harlot—SGD) city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.

If we know where the Lord was crucified, we know the identity of this religious harlot Sodom. It is Old Covenant Jerusalem. Babylon is spoken of again in Rev. 18.24:

> 24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that have been slain upon the earth (*ge*, lit., land—SGD).

Thus, Revelation has the great harlot, responsible for killing the prophets and saints, as the great city Babylon. Interpreters of Revelation speculate whether Babylon is literal Babylon in Iraq, or Rome. Neither of those cities slew God's prophets, but Old Covenant Jerusalem certainly did. In Lk. 13.33-34, Jesus said:

> 33 Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following: *for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem*. 34 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her own brood under her wings, and ye would not!

Thus, in Revelation, Jerusalem was the harlot city that killed the prophets, and where Jesus was crucified.

Back to Deuteronomy 32

We conclude our side trip into Deuteronomy 32 and Revelation and return to our discussion of just Deuteronomy 32. In Dt. 32.34-36, we have Moses speaking of God's vengeance on Israel:

> 34 Is it not laid up in store with Me, Sealed up in My treasuries? 35 *Vengeance* is Mine, and retribution, In due time their foot will slip; For the day of their calamity is near, And the impending things are hastening upon them. 36 For the LORD will *vindicate* His people, And will have compassion on His servants; When He sees that their strength is gone, And there is none remaining, bond or free.

Notice that vengeance and vindication will take place at the same time. Both groups of people (the righteous and the wicked) will see the same event, the end of Old Covenant Israel (at the hands of the Ro-

mans in AD 70) and interpret it entirely differently. The wicked see cruel destruction; the righteous see their salvation from the wicked. This is not unique to their judgment. In the flood of Noah's time, the wicked and righteous again saw the same event entirely differently. The wicked saw their destruction, while the same flood was the salvation of the righteous as the same water that destroyed the wicked carried the righteous to a new world order after the flood. This passage is alluded to in Hebrews 10:30-31 to describe a first century judgment of Old Covenant Israel.

Jesus speaks of this same vengeance of God on Old Covenant Israel in Lk. 21.20-24, when he says:

> B*ut when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies*, then know that her desolation is at hand. Then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains; and let them that are in the midst of her depart out; and let not them that are in the country enter therein. For these are days of vengeance, that *all things which are written may be fulfilled*. Woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! for there shall be great distress upon the land, and wrath unto this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led captive into all the nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

"All things that are written may be fulfilled" would certainly include the prophecy of God's vengeance on Old Covenant Israel, as well as the vindication of the righteous and the taking of the gospel to the Gentiles.

Martyr Vindication in Isaiah 2-4

In Isa. 2.2, Isaiah foretells in Old Covenant Israel's *last days*:

> Now it will come about that In *the last days*, The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it.

The last days are the last days of the Mosaic covenant. The Jews in Bible times (and now, if they don't believe Jesus is the messiah) rec-

ognized two ages, the age of Moses, and the age of the messiah (Mt. 12.31-32, Lk. 20.27-35), and the age of the messiah has no end (Isa. 9.6-7, Lk. 1.33, Eph. 3.21) thus no "end times," last days, last day, or last hour. The Mosaic age had all of those time elements. Notice all the occurrences of "in that day" in 2.11-12 (a day of reckoning and a day of Jehovah), 17, 3.7, 18, and 4.1, 2 that link all of chapters 2-4 together. Then, in 2.12, Isaiah says, concerning the day of Jehovah:

> For there shall be *a day of Jehovah* of hosts upon all that is proud and haughty, and upon all that is lifted up; and it shall be brought low; (ASV)

So there's to be a day of Jehovah in Israel's last days. In 2.19-21, Isaiah says:

> 19 And men will go into caves of the rocks, And into holes of the ground Before the terror of the LORD, And before the splendor of His majesty, When He arises to make the earth tremble. 20 *In that day* men will cast away to the moles and the bats Their idols of silver and their idols of gold, Which they made for themselves to worship, 21 In order to go into the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs, Before the terror of the LORD and the splendor of His majesty, When He arises to make the earth tremble.

It's astounding that Jesus quotes these verses in Lk. 23.28-31 and applies Isaiah's teaching of the Day of Jehovah in Israel's last days to the upcoming destruction of Jerusalem! Not only that, but the author of Hebrews quotes from them in Heb. 12.26 and gives them the same application. Finally, John quotes them in Rev. 6.16 and also applies them to the upcoming destruction of Babylon the harlot, where Jesus was crucified!

In Isa. 4.2-4, Isaiah says:

> 2 *In that day* [this is still on the day of the Lord in Old Covenant Israel's last days–SGD] the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth will be the pride and the adornment of *the survivors of Israel*. 3 And it will come about that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy–everyone who is recorded for life in Jerusalem. 4 When the Lord has washed away the filth of

> the daughters of Zion, and *purged the bloodshed of Jerusalem* from her midst, by the spirit of *judgment* and the spirit of *burning*,

So Isaiah foretold the day of the Lord in Jesus' generation, where Jerusalem would be burned, her bloodguilt would be purged, the martyrs would be vindicated, and only the faithful would escape, just as Jesus himself had foretold in Matthew 24-25. On the spirit of judgment and burning, consider Heb. 10.27.

Martyr Vindication in Matthew 21.33-45 – Parable of the Vineyard

> 33 Hear another parable: There was a man that was a householder, who planted a vineyard, and set a hedge about it, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into another country. 34 And when the season of the fruits drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, to receive his fruits. 35 And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them in like manner. 37 But afterward he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. 38 But the husbandmen, when they saw the son, said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and take his inheritance. 39 And they took him, and cast him forth out of the vineyard, and killed him. 40 *When therefore the lord of the vineyard shall come*, what will he do unto those husbandmen? 41 They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits in their seasons. 42 Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, The same was made the head of the corner; This was from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes? 43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. 44 And he that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces: but

> on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust. 45 And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, *they perceived that he spake of them* [emphasis mine—SGD].

Many times throughout the Old Testament, Israel was spoken of as God's vineyard. He specially prepared her, planted her, cared for her, yet in Jesus' time Old Covenant Israel had neglected God's vineyard. When God held them accountable by sending them his servants the prophets, the Jews mistreated and killed them. When God sent his son, they killed him. Jesus told this story and asked the Jews in his audience, "When therefore the lord of the vineyard shall come, what will he do unto those husbandmen?" and they judged themselves with their own mouths: "He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits in their seasons," which is exactly what happened to the wicked Jews of Jesus' generation. The blood of all the martyrs from Abel on was vindicated in the destruction of Jerusalem, just as Jesus had promised.

He spoke of *them*, not just anyone, not us, not some theoretical people, but he spoke of *them*. *They* had killed the prophets. *They* were going to kill the son, Jesus himself. *They* will be miserably destroyed and the vineyard will be given to others, Gentiles.

Martyr Vindication at the Time of the Wedding Banquet – Matthew 22.1-14

> 1 And Jesus answered and spake again in parables unto them, saying, 2 The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son, 3 and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast: and they would not come. 4 Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them that are bidden, Behold, I have made ready my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come to the marriage feast. 5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise; 6 and the rest laid hold on his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7 *But the king was wroth; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their*

> *city*. 8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy. 9 Go ye therefore unto the partings of the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage feast. 10 And those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was filled with guests. 11 But when the king came in to behold the guests, he saw there a man who had not on a wedding-garment: 12 and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. 14 For many are called, but few chosen.

Notice that after the king vented his wrath and destroyed their city, he went right on with the wedding. This is what we see in Revelation 18-19. Chapter 18 describes the destruction of the harlot city, Old Covenant Jerusalem (Rev. 11.8 – where their Lord was crucified), and chapter 19 proceeds with the wedding feast, which took place at the destruction of Jerusalem.

Luke 13.33-35

> 33 Nevertheless I must go on my way to-day and to-morrow and the day following: *for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem*. 34 *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her!* how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her own brood under her wings, and ye would not! 35 Behold, *your house is left unto you desolate*: and I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

We include this passage merely to strengthen the case that Jerusalem was the harlot city that was guilty of slaying the prophets.

Martyr Vindication in the Parable of the Unrelenting Widow – Lk. 18.1-7

> 1 And he spake a parable unto them to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint; 2 saying, There was in a city a judge, who feared not God, and regarded not man: 3 and there was a widow in that city; and she came oft unto him, saying, *Avenge me of mine adversary*. 4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; 5 yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest she wear me out by her continual coming. 6 And the Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge saith. 7 And *shall not God avenge his elect*, that cry to him day and night, and yet he is longsuffering over them?

So just like an unrighteous judge who had no regard for God nor man would avenge this lady, how much more would a righteous God avenge his elect, especially since he had promised to do so since the very beginning of Old Covenant Israel. He avenged the lady against her adversary.

Martyr Vindication in Mt. 23.29-39

> 29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and garnish the tombs of the righteous, 30 and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the *blood of the prophets*. 31 Wherefore ye witness to yourselves, that ye are sons of them that slew the prophets. 32 *Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers*. 33 Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell? 34 Therefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: some of them shall ye kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city: 35 *that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous unto the blood of Zachariah* son of Barachiah, whom ye slew

> between the sanctuary and the altar. 36 Verily I say unto you, *All these things shall come upon this generation.* 37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! 38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. 39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

This text is significant because Jesus gives the time for the vindication of the martyrs. Moses had given it as the time of the perverse and crooked generation of Jews in their last days. Isaiah had said it would be at the day of Jehovah. Jesus says the same thing, "in his generation."

Martyr Vindication in Luke 23.26-30

> 26 And when they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon of Cyrene, coming from the country, and laid on him the cross, to bear it after Jesus. 27 And there followed him a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him. 28 But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. 29 For behold, the days are coming, in which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the breasts that never gave suck. 30 *Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.*

In these verses, Jesus is quoting directly from Isa. 2.19, where Isaiah had foretold that in Israel's last days, on the day of Jehovah, God's terror would drive his disobedient people to this behavior:

> And men shall go into the caves of the rocks, and into the holes of the earth, from before the terror of Jehovah, and from the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake mightily the earth.

Remarkably, the author of Hebrews quotes this same verse in 12.26 and applies it to the imminent destruction of Jerusalem, and John quotes it in Rev. 6.16, again in view of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem.

Martyr Vindication in I Corinthians 15

A very important passage on martyr vindication and the resurrection is found in I Cor. 15.29-34, as Paul deals with the subject of the resurrection and the practice of some in baptism for the dead. Usually, our focus on the controversies about baptism for the dead detracts our notice from Paul's attention to martyr vindication and the resurrection.

Although we devote over a hundred pages to our discussion of I Corinthians 15 in *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview to the Study of Last Things* (which the interested reader may want to consult), we want to just briefly mention Paul's teaching on martyr vindication and the resurrection.

Without bogging down on baptism for the dead, we notice first of all some in the church in Corinth were denying the resurrection of some, not all, of the dead. As we show in our major resurrection study, the Corinthians weren't denying the resurrection of Christ, nor their own resurrection. They were denying the resurrection of Old Covenant saints, as part of the major first century church problem, the friction between Jewish and Gentile Christians. This problem permeates nearly every chapter of I Corinthians.

Second, even though there is a practice in our time of baptism for the dead, vicarious baptism, practiced by the Mormons or Latter-Day saints (which even contradicts their own *Book of Mormon*!), Paul probably isn't referring to a false practice of his day. That would be something like me opposing Roman Catholic teaching on the deity of Christ by saying, "Why, that can't possibly be correct because that would mean that our Jehovah's Witness friends would be wrong!"

Third, when Paul spoke of baptism for the dead, the word he used for "for" was *hyper*, the Greek preposition meaning *upon*, not "for the benefit of." Paul was speaking of baptism based *upon* a particular view of the dead: that they were going to be resurrected! If they weren't going to be, why in the world would someone be baptized based upon that view? It would be the stupidest thing in the world!

Paul and the other apostles taught and practiced baptism because of their view toward the dead, and that is that the dead would be raised. It's entirely possible that the baptism Paul refers to isn't baptism in

water, but the apostles being immersed or overwhelmed in suffering. This makes sense because in verses 30-32, Paul delineated the physical suffering first-century preachers endured in behalf of those they were teaching. What would they accomplish if those they were suffering for would not be raised? In addition, Jesus foretold his own baptism in suffering (Lk. 12.50), as well as their suffering in behalf of the gospel (Mt. 10.23, 23.34).

Paul speaks of the suffering he's enduring for his preaching on the resurrection of the dead ones. He quotes from Isa. 22.12-13, where Isaiah, announcing Judah's forthcoming destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon in 586 BC says:

> 12 Therefore in that day the Lord GOD of hosts, called you to weeping, to wailing, To shaving the head, and to wearing sackcloth. 13 Instead, there is gaiety and gladness, Killing of cattle and slaughtering of sheep, Eating of meat and drinking of wine: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we may die."

So the people of Judah were doomed because God called them to repentance, but they refused and instead said, "Since we're going to die, let's eat and drink!" Paul affirms in I Corinthians 15 that that's what all ought to do if there's no resurrection of the dead ones.

Yet Paul didn't really believe that. He believed in the resurrection so much that he was suffering greatly at the hands of disobedient Jews because of his convictions, and was constantly in jeopardy of his life!

Paul refers to this physical persecution in Col. 1.24 in an amazing statement:

> Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church;

At first glance, it seems that Paul is saying that Christ didn't suffer sufficiently on the cross for the sins of mankind, yet Paul didn't believe or teach such a thing. He's referring to the afflictions that both he and Jesus suffered for the church, and affirms that Christ didn't so all of the suffering that was to take place, but that he and the other apostles were to undergo for the benefit of the church.

While on earth, Jesus had taught in Mt. 23.29ff that his generation of Jews were going to vindicate the blood of all the prophets that had been shed from Abel to Zechariah, as well as for his own blood, and

his apostles and prophets, and that it would be accomplished in his generation, at the destruction of Jerusalem. Of course, the blood of Christ and the Old Testament prophets had not been avenged by the middle of the first century, nor had it been by the time Paul wrote Colossians, and it is to that lack that Paul refers in the above passage. Paul refers to this in I Cor. 4.9-13 when he says:

> 9 For, I think, God hath set forth us the apostles *last of all*, as men doomed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, both to angels and men ... 11 Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; 12 and we toil, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; 13 being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things, even until now.

Until Christ's apostles, prophets, and saints had been vindicated by the punishment of the rebellious Jews, their "cup" of unjustly shed blood would not be vindicated. This would take place at the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and it is to this suffering Paul refers in I Cor. 15.29-32. How ridiculous for Paul and the other apostles to suffer so for preaching the gospel if there was no resurrection, for they were preaching it! Truly, if there was no resurrection, Paul and the rest were "of all men most miserable"! Thus in Paul's mind, there was an unbreakable link between the vindication of the apostolic martyrs and the resurrection. We'll have more to say about this in connection with John's teaching on the resurrection in Revelation 20.

The Martyrs of Hebrews 11.32-38

The book of Hebrews has much to say about Old Covenant Israel's last days, but in Heb. 11.32-38, martyrs are particularly referred to in view of the upcoming vengeance on Old Covenant Israel:

> 32 And what shall I more say? for the time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah; of David and Samuel and the prophets: 33 who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from

> weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens. 35 Women received their dead by a (biological–SGD) resurrection: and others were *tortured*, not accepting their deliverance; that they might obtain a better (better than biological–SGD) resurrection: 36 and others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: 37 they were *stoned*, they were *sawn asunder*, they were tempted, they were *slain with the sword*: they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated 38 of whom the world was not worthy, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves, and the holes of the earth.

Clearly these are martyrs of God. As such, Jesus said they would be avenged in his generation, Mt. 23.33-36. Moses said they would be avenged at Old Covenant Israel's end by God's judgment on a perverse and crooked generation, Dt. 32.35-36. The author of Hebrews quoted those very verses from Moses in Heb. 10.30-31:

> 30 For we know him that said, *Vengeance belongeth unto me*, I will recompense. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

It is particularly interesting that v30 is quoted directly only from Dt. 32.35, and v31 is quoted only from Dt. 32.36. This is significant because Deuteronomy 32, the song of Moses, deals with the end of Old Covenant Israel.

As a matter of fact, consider Dt. 32.35-36, and notice the similarity of that passage with our current text:

> 35 Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, In due time their foot will slip; For *the day of their calamity is near*, And the impending things are hastening upon them. 36 For the LORD will vindicate His people, And will have compassion on His servants; When He sees that their strength is gone, And there is none remaining, bond or free.

This "day of calamity" is "the day" the Christians in Hebrews could see approaching. It was the day when the righteous would be vindicated and the ungodly would be destroyed.

Martyr Vindication in II Thessalonians 1

In I Thes. 2.14, 16, Paul mentions the sufferings of the Thessalonian Christians:

> 14 For ye, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judaea in Christ Jesus: for ye also suffered the same things of your own countrymen, even as they did of the Jews...16 - forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved; to *fill up their sins* always: but *the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.*

Of course, the Judean Christians had suffered at the hands of the Jews even to the point of death, and the Thessalonians are suffering the same martyrdom. The Jews were thus "filling up their sins," just as Jesus had told them in Mt. 23.32ff. Hence, Paul says that God's wrath *has come* upon them to *the uttermost*, "the end" of Dt. 32.20.

Uttermost here is literally "end," or "goal." Because of the persecution that the rebellious last generation Old Covenant Jews are pouring out upon Christians, whether in Judea or in Macedonia, God's wrath is about to be poured out on them.

When Paul says God's wrath is come, he uses the perfect tense; literally, God's wrath *has come*. God's judgment is so close now, and so certain, that there's no escape, no turning back.

The Thessalonian martyrs are also referred to in the famous I Thes. 4.14:

> For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

The phrase "in Jesus" at first glance makes us think that these are Christians, those who were baptized into Christ (Rom. 6.3, Gal. 3.27). However, the preposition translated "in" here is *dia*, meaning *through* Christ, or *because of* Christ. These weren't dying because of disease or old age, but because of their faith in Christ. They were martyrs because of Christ, and some of them were not Christians, but would be martyred Jewish saints who lived both before and after Christ's incarnation. Notice Heb. 11.24-26 which illustrates this concept:

> 24 By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; 25 choosing

> rather to share ill treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; 26 accounting the *reproach of Christ* greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he looked unto the recompense of reward.

The author of Hebrews tells us that when Moses suffered for his faith in God, he was suffering the reproach of Christ, i.e., the same kind of reproach Christ suffered because of his faithfulness. Likewise, in Heb. 10.32f, we see:

> 32 But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were enlightened, ye endured a great conflict of sufferings; 33 partly, being made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, becoming partakers with them that were so used.

So, because of Christ, the Jewish Christians in Hebrews were suffering the same reproaches that Moses did, *the reproaches of Christ.* Moses and other Old Covenant saints weren't Christians, but they were suffering *through* or *because* of Christ. Thus, the dead in Christ in this passage includes faithful Old Covenant saints as well as martyred Christians of the first century. In our chapters on I Corinthians 15, we see that Paul's teaching there was concerned with exactly these same groups. Of course, in Mt. 23.36, Jesus said that all these martyrs would be avenged when he came again in his generation. For further discussion of the eschatology of the Thessalonian letters, please see Appendix 5 of the author's *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things.* In II Thes. 1.4, Paul speaks of the afflictions of the Thessalonians, including the same martyrs mentioned in I Thessalonians:

> 4 we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions which ye endure;

"in all your persecutions and in the afflictions which ye endure"

An understanding of the word "afflictions" in Thessalonians will help us understand this passage. The Greek word is *thlipsis*, which means "pressure." From the beginning of the church in Thessalonica, unbelieving Jews were putting pressure on these young Christians.

Paul refers to their afflictions five times in these two letters. In I Thes. 3.4, Paul said, "For verily, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we are to suffer *affliction*; even as it came to pass, and ye know." Now, in II Thes. 1.5, we have:

> 5 which is a manifest token of the *righteous judgment of God*; to the end that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:

"manifest token of the righteous judgment of God"

Paul says their endurance of this pressure from persecution is an obvious sign of something that's coming, God's judgment. It's manifestly unjust for these godly people to suffer for their faith, and the time is coming when God will right and avenge every unrighted wrong.

> 6 if so be that it is a righteous thing with God to *recompense affliction to them that afflict you,* 7 and *to you that are afflicted rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven* with the angels of his power in flaming fire,

"if so be that it is righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to them that afflict you"

God's righteous judgment will recompense, or pay back, pressure to the Jews that are putting pressure on the Thessalonians, and in the next phrase, Paul reveals that something else is going to be paid back.

"and to you that are afflicted rest with us"

It's very important to notice that the word "rest" here is a noun, not a verb. God is going to pay back *affliction* to the afflicters, their Jewish persecutors, and he's going to pay back *rest* to the Thessalonians.

The word "rest" here is from the Greek word *anesin*, which means *relief*, relief from the pressure. This word is where the name of the commercial painkiller Anacin comes from, yet the commercials for Rolaids say, "How do you spell *relief*?" Thus, God is going to pay back affliction to the Jewish persecutors, and he's going to pay back *relief* or *rest* to the afflicted Thessalonians. When did Jesus say this payback was going to occur? At his coming, in his generation, Mt. 23.33-36.

If the popular view of the return of Christ, that it's at least 2000+ years in Paul's future, is true, the Thessalonians never got their relief! If it was a righteous thing for them to get relief, what would it be if they didn't get it? Paul isn't thinking that the Thessalonians will get their relief by dying, but by Jesus coming and executing judgment on the Jews for their persecution of Christians. This coming and judgment is the very one that Jesus spoke of in Mt. 16.27-28, which would occur during the lifetime of his disciples, and in Matthew 24-25, where Jesus taught he would come and judge the Jews in his generation (Mt. 24.34), and at the end of the age (Mt. 24.3). This was the end of the Mosaic age, not the end of the Christian age, which has no end (Isa. 9.6, Lk. 1.33, Eph. 3.20), no last days, or no last day. The Mosaic age had all three of these, and it was coming about 18 years in the future of the Thessalonians.

The fiery nature of Jesus' judgment on Old Covenant Israel had been foretold by Malachi in Mal. 4.1: "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." For a detailed discussion of this passage, please see "Appendix 1: Imminent Judgment in the Gospels." This was followed up on by John the Baptist in Mt. 3.10-11, where he spoke of the messiah's judgment in terms of "unquenchable fire." Jesus further taught this in Lk. 12.49, where he said he came to "cast fire upon the land," and the author of Hebrews, as we've just seen in Heb. 10.27, spoke of Christians in the vicinity of Jerusalem in the mid 60s AD who could see a day drawing nigh characterized by "a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries."

Martyr Vindication in Revelation

Since Revelation is from Jesus Christ, we shouldn't be surprised that Jesus' teaching in this book agrees with his teaching in the gospels and in the epistles of Jesus' apostles, since all this teaching is from the same source, Jesus.

Revelation 6.9-11

We're now ready to follow our theme of martyr vindication into the topic of this volume, the book of Revelation. We begin with Rev. 6.9:

> 9 And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: 10 and they cried with a great voice, saying, How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not *judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth* (Gr. *ge*, land)*?* 11 And there was given them to each one a white robe; and it was said unto them, that they should *rest yet for a little time*, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, who should be killed even as they were, should have fulfilled their course.

This scene is of the utmost importance, for the rest of the book is the answer to the question of these martyrs. They are asking the same question the nagging widow asked in Luke 18: "*When* will God avenge me of my adversary? *When* will you avenge our blood on them that dwell on the land (of Old Covenant Israel)?" Moses in Deuteronomy 32 said it was the land of Israel that would bear the vengeance for the blood of the saints in Old Covenant Israel's last days, at her *end*. Isaiah foretold the same thing, saying this vengeance would take place *on the day of Jehovah*. In Matthew 21, Jesus, speaking of the rebellious Jews of his day said, "He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen." In Matthew 22, Jesus said that the king was wroth, destroyed their city, and went right on with the wedding! In Luke 13, Jesus said it was impossible that a prophet could perish outside Jerusalem, and that the Jewish temple was being left desolate. In Matthew 23, Jesus said that Jerusalem would fill up the measure of her sin and be held responsible for the blood of all the righteous from Abel to Zechariah *in his generation*! In Luke 23, on his way to Golgotha, Jesus told the wailing women to weep for themselves, that they would plead for the mountains to fall on them. The author of Hebrews spoke of the rebellious Jews in Hebrews 10, quoting from Deuteronomy 32, where God said of Old Covenant Israel in her last days, that "vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Revelation 11.18

Speculation abounds about the identity of these two faithful witnesses in this chapter. From verse 3, it is clear they are prophets. They

are killed by the beast (v7). Their dead bodies lie in the street of the great city, spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified (v8), while the people that lived on the land rejoiced over their demise. God then resurrects them (v11) and judges their city (v13). Verse 18 describes the vindication of these two martyrs:

> And the nations were wroth, and thy wrath came, and the time of the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear thy name, the small and the great; and to destroy them that destroy the earth (Gr. *ge*, land—SGD).

It really doesn't matter who these two prophets were or who they may have represented, does it? God knew them and avenged their martyrdom, just as he promised as far back as Deuteronomy 32, Isaiah 2-4, in the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 21-23, and in the apostolic epistles preceding Revelation.

Revelation 16.5ff

In Revelation 16, we have a series of bowls of wrath being poured out on "the land," presumably the land of Old Covenant Israel, responsible for the deaths of the martyrs we've seen thus far. In vv 5-7, the third angel says as he pours out his bowl:

> 5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying, Righteous art thou, who art and who wast, thou Holy One, because thou didst thus judge: 6 *for they poured out the blood of the saints and the prophets, and blood hast thou given them to drink*: they are worthy. 7 And I heard the altar saying, Yea, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.

That this text is dealing with martyr vindication is obvious, as this angel proclaims God's righteousness in judging the land which was guilty of pouring out the blood of saints and prophets, and that it is thus deserving of having them to drink blood. Verse 7 reveals the altar, presumably the martyrs under the altar of 6.9-11 pronouncing their approval of God's judgments, again in response to their plea. Later verses in this chapter tell of further judgments coming on the great city, Jerusalem (where their Lord was crucified, 11.8).

Revelation 17.5-6

Chapter 17 begins by further describing the great harlot, and John says in 17.5-6:

> 5 and upon her forehead a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. 6 And I saw the woman drunken with the *blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.* And when I saw her, I wondered with a great wonder.

These words certainly describe Jerusalem, as seen in both the Old and New Testaments as the one responsible for the death of these faithful martyrs. The remainder of the chapter describes the judgments coming on the great harlot city (v18) in vindication of God's saints.

Revelation 18.20-21

This chapter begins with the angelic announcement of the fall of the great harlot city, v2:

> 2 And he cried with a mighty voice, saying, *Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great,* and is become a habitation of demons, and a hold of every unclean spirit, and a hold of every unclean and hateful bird.

In verses 9-10, the announcement continues:

> 9 And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and lived wantonly with her, shall weep and wail over her, when they look upon the smoke of her burning, 10 standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, *Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.*

Then in vv20-21, we have:

> 20 Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and *ye saints, and ye apostles, and ye prophets*; for *God hath judged your judgment on her.* 21 And a strong angel took up a stone as it were a great millstone and cast it into the

> sea, saying, Thus with a mighty fall shall *Babylon, the great city*, be cast down, and shall be found no more at all.

Again, this is clearly a passage concerning the vindication of the martyrs by God, and his judgments on the great harlot city, Jerusalem, as described from Deuteronomy onward.

Finally, in v24, we see that heaven's description of the magnitude of God's judgment on the great harlot city is just as Jesus had foretold it in Mt. 23.29-39:

> 24 And in her was found the *blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that have been slain upon the earth.*

Revelation 19.1-2

We next see heaven's reaction to Babylon's destruction described, verses 1-2:

> 1 After these things I heard as it were a great voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, Hallelujah; Salvation, and glory, and power, belong to our God: 2 for true and righteous are his judgments; for he hath *judged the great harlot*, her that corrupted the earth with her fornication, and *he hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.*

Later in this chapter (vv8ff), we see the marriage of the Lamb proceeding right on after the destruction of the harlot city, just as Jesus had foretold in Mt. 22.2-10:

> 2 The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son, 3 and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast: and they would not come. 4 Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them that are bidden, Behold, I have made ready my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come to the marriage feast. 5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise; 6 and the rest laid hold on his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7 *But the king was wroth; and he sent his armies, and*

> *destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.* 8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy. 9 Go ye therefore unto the partings of the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage feast. 10 And those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and *the wedding was filled with guests*..

With the destruction of Old Covenant Jerusalem, chapter 21.2 reveals its replacement: New Jerusalem:

> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

New Jerusalem was spoken of to the Hebrew Christians in Heb. 12.19-24 shortly before the destruction of Old Covenant Jerusalem:

> 19 For ye are not come unto a mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, and unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, 19 and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that no word more should be spoken unto them; 20 for they could not endure that which was enjoined, If even a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned; 21 and so fearful was the appearance, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake: 22 but *ye are come unto mount Zion*, and unto the city of the living God, *the heavenly Jerusalem*, and to innumerable hosts of angels, 23 *to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven*, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than that of Abel.

Notice that the author of Hebrews identifies the new heavenly Jerusalem as the universal church of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion on the Date of Writing

From our study of the theme of martyr vindication from Genesis to Revelation, we see that Revelation was written while Old Covenant Jerusalem was still standing, as was its temple. Since that city and temple were completely destroyed by the Roman general Titus in 70AD, the book was certainly written shortly (1.1) before the destruction of Jerusalem. It fairly bristles with warnings of imminent judgment coming on Old Covenant Israel for its persecution of both Old and New Covenant saints, prophets, and apostles. Since it's obvious from the theme of martyr vindication on Old Covenant Jerusalem that Deuteronomy to Revelation is concerned with persecution of God's saints by Jerusalem, we need not concern ourselves primarily with persecution by Rome, whether it was under Nero for the early date or Domitian for the late date. Given that the book refers several times to the time of tribulation of the saints before Jerusalem's destruction as 1260 days, 42 months, and time (1 year), times (2 years), and half a time (half a year), and that historically, the length of the Roman war with Jerusalem lasted 3-1/2 years, John evidently saw the book in a vision at the time of the war. The terms John used to describe the duration of their tribulation are used only in Revelation and Daniel, where Daniel used them to describe the same tribulation for the same length of time.

Interestingly, Revelation wasn't the last New Testament book to be written. In Rev. 3.10, John speaks of "the fiery trial that is coming" on those saints:

> Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the *hour of trial*, that hour *which is to come* upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth (Gr. *ge*, land).

John speaks of the hour of trial that is still future. However, in I Pet. 4.12, Peter refers to the same trial on the same saints (in Asia Minor) in these words:

> Beloved, think it not strange concerning the *fiery trial among you*, which cometh upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you:

Since Peter refers to the trial as already occurring, evidently Peter's epistles were written after John wrote Revelation.

A Brief Review of the Late Date Based on Irenaeus' Testimony

We now briefly discuss the major argument for the late date of the writing of Revelation. Those who think the book was written in the 60s during the imperial reign of Nero in Rome tend to view the main subject to be the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman general Titus in 70 AD. Those viewing the book as written in the 90s during the imperial reign of Domitian tend to think the main subject to be the persecution of Christians by Rome, or the development of Roman Catholicism. The author was raised believing the late date, but now takes the position that Revelation was written at the earlier date. There are two lines of argumentation: Those taking the late date usually rely mostly on external evidence from "church fathers," while those taking the early date rely mostly on internal evidence from the text of Revelation itself. We will now examine the external evidence for the late date.

The Testimony of Irenaeus for the Late Date of Writing

Apparently, the weightiest external evidence for the late date of writing Revelation is that of Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (130-202 AD), and later a Roman Catholic Saint, who was said to be a student of Polycarp (69-155 AD), who was said to be a disciple of the Apostle John, the universally accepted author of Revelation. Irenaeus related that as a young boy, he heard Polycarp as a young man speak of John and the Revelation, but he didn't write anything about it until fifty years later, in 180 AD, when he wrote in Greek. In 325, Eusebius quoted Irenaeus' statement in Latin, as Irenaeus' Greek testimony had not survived. It is well known that Irenaeus' statement about the time element in Revelation is indeterminate, i.e., it is not clear whether Irenaeus was saying that John was seen in Domitian's reign, or whether John's vision was seen in Domitian's reign. The quotation given by Eusebius is from Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*, Book V, Chapter 30, in paragraph 4. It concerns the identity of the beast of Rev. 13.18, whose number is 666. Irenaeus is discussing the risk of identifying the beast from this number, and declines to do so, lest he choose wrong and thereby teach something the Holy Spirit didn't tell John. Speaking of the beast as Antichrist, a term which doesn't even occur in Revelation, Irenaeus is quoted by Eusebius as saying:

> We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision, For [it or he] was seen not very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign.

First of all, notice that Irenaeus didn't witness the Apostle John's saying or writing anything. This is Eusebius' quotation of Irenaeus 145 years after he wrote it, which itself was 50 years after he claimed to have heard Polycarp. Second, Irenaeus referred to the beast of Revelation 13 as "Antichrist," when John didn't use "Antichrist" in the entire Revelation! Third, it is impossible to determine what Irenaeus said was "seen". Was "it" John or the vision? Grammatically, it can be either one. No man knows for sure. Fourth, Irenaeus was not even discussing when the Revelation was written, yet this is the principal piece of evidence for the late date of Revelation! Notice Burton Coffman's comment on the value of Irenaeus' testimony:

> His (Eusebius') quotation (of Irenaeus' statement) does not even mention "the writing" of Revelation, but refers solely to the time when certain unnamed persons are alleged to have *seen* either the *apostle* or the *prophecy*, nobody knows which. This proves *nothing*. Besides that: If he meant the Apocalypse was seen, and if it had been originally composed in quotation, could not have reference to the Greek translation, if indeed it referred to the Revelation at all. There goes the whole case for the latter date," (*Commentary on Revelation*, Burton Coffman, p 4).

There are other problems with excessive reliance on Irenaeus for determining the date of Revelation. At the time Irenaeus wrote of his youthful conversation with Polycarp, he was the Bishop of Lyons, France, and later became a Roman Catholic saint. He upheld what became the Roman Catholic difference between Bishop and Elder, when the New Testament uses the terms interchangeably. For example, in Ac. 20.17-18, Luke says of Paul:

> And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called to him the *elders* of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them...

So Paul is talking to the elders of the church from Ephesus. However, in this conversation, Paul tells these elders in verse 28:

> Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you *bishops*, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood.

In addition to calling these elders bishops, Paul refers to their role as shepherds when he uses the word "to feed," the verb form of "shepherd." Peter also uses the words elder and bishop interchangeably in I Pet. 5.1-2:

> The *elders* among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: *Tend* the flock of God which is among you, *exercising the oversight.*

Thus Peter also recognizes that elders are *overseers* or *bishops*, as well as *shepherds*, those who tend sheep. Incidentally, our word "pastor" comes from a Latin translation of this word for shepherd. One wonders why a Hungarian word wasn't used. Pastor is a term generally used for ministers, but in the New Testament, the term was used of the elders/bishops. Thus, Irenaeus's distinction between elders and bishops was in error, as it is by Roman Catholicism, which misuses the terms the same way. Not only did Irenaeus make an unscriptural distinction between elder and bishop, but he also advocated the supremacy of the Roman bishop, a doctrine which ultimately led to the papacy. Irenaeus likewise upheld the perpetual virginity of Mary. Thus, he was an early developer of Mariolatry, arguing that since mankind's death came through a woman (Eve), mankind's salvation was to take place through a woman, Mary. On Christ, Irenaeus argued that Christ, to be able to understand and sympathize with the trials of the elderly, lived to the age of fifty, and he emphasized the incarnation of Christ to achieve this sympathy, rather than the crucifixion.

Note that most of us non-Catholics don't believe a single one of these doctrines which led to full-blown Roman Catholicism, yet some are willing to accept without question Irenaeus' hearsay quotation of Polycarp on the time of the writing of Revelation, when the quotation didn't even concern the time of writing!

A Few Other Introductory Matters Briefly Considered

Revelation is John's version of the Olivet Discourse

Many readers of the author's previous material on the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24-25 will not be surprised to find that he views Revelation to be dealing with the same subject: the destruction of Jerusalem in avenging the blood of the martyred saints of God, in both the Old and New Testaments. If you're not familiar with the theme of imminent judgment in the New Testament, please see Appendices 1-3 in this volume where that theme is discussed, especially Appendix 2 which sets forth the author's views on the Olivet Discourse. Many times Bible students ask, "How come Matthew, Mark, and Luke all give accounts of the Olivet Discourse, but John doesn't in his gospel?" The answer is that John *does* give his account, not in the fourth gospel, but in Revelation.

Allusions to Old Testament Texts

Farrell Jenkins makes a significant observation about the nature of Revelation's language

> This book speaks not the language of Paul, but the Old Testament prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel...The Book of Revelation is the most thoroughly Jewish in its language and imagery of any New Testament book. (Jenkins, Farrell *The Old Testament in The Book of Revelation* (Cogdill Foundation Publications, 1972, p. 22)

Consistent with that observation is that it's been reliably said that Revelation contains between 300-400 allusions (not quotations) to the Old Testament. More than half of those are references to the Old Testament prophets, and half of those are in Ezekiel and Daniel. It should be obvious that the Jewish Christians who were the first readers of this book had a background and understanding of those prophets, while most of us in this century do not. Thus, it behooves students now to develop a background in the prophets. For more discussion of this suggestion, please see Appendix 4, "The Importance of the Old Testament to New Testament Christians." There, you will see that the Old Testament should be seriously studied as it's inspired of God, and neglect-

ing it is ignoring three-fourths of the inspired literature on earth. Christians today should study the Old Testament in order to imitate first century Christians. The Old Testament is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Finally, Christians are commanded to take heed to the Old Testament scriptures. Christians who do so will receive a big payoff in their study of Revelation.

Our Approach in Brief

Since we've seen in this introduction that Revelation was written shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, our aim in this volume will be to understand the book as useful to first century Christians, i.e., concerning "things which must shortly come to pass," as John stated in the first verse of his book.. We will insist on interpreting as they would have, and then accept that interpretation for ourselves, or we won't be interpreting correctly.

Chapter 1

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

vv1-3: Introduction and Purpose of Book

1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show unto his servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass: and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John;

First, notice closely the title of the book: Revelation. It's not Revelations, as it's often spoken of. One who says Revelations displays a lack of fundamental knowledge of the book, just as one who speaks of the books of Act, Hebrew, Ephesian, or Colossian. They've not studied the book sufficiently to even know the title!

"Revelation" comes from the Greek word *apokalupsis*, a compound word composed of *apo* (from) and *kalypto* (veil), thus, to uncover or reveal something, like unveiling a new car model. The English word apocalypse comes from this word. It doesn't mean calamity, catastrophe, war, or disaster, as it's used in movies, but anything revealed. The purpose of the book is to reveal things that were covered up. In this case, things which were required ("must"!) to occur shortly when the book was written. This means that Revelation concerns things which would mean something to the Christians to whom it was written.

If there's a book in the Bible that clearly reveals truth, it should be Revelation. It's a shame that a book written to uncover truth has been so abused by fantastic interpretations which have obscured its truths. Many think the book contains descriptions of space ships, nuclear weapons, the papacy, Hitler, Mussolini, the European Common Market, the United Nations, etc., of modern time, of which the original recipients of the book would have known nothing. As happens many times in religion, those extremes have produced an overreaction in the

other direction, whereby many think the book cannot be understood. As we'll see in v3, John believes the book can be read, understood, and acted upon.

The purpose of the book is clearly given: to reveal things which were shortly to come to pass in John's day, not in our day, nor in any day from shortly after John wrote it until now. Successful interpretation of this book will be that which first century Christians saw in their own time. If our interpretation involves events they could have not known of, our interpretation is wrong.

Notice also that John said these things *must* shortly come to pass. It's not that they *might* be fulfilled shortly, but they *must be fulfilled shortly*, unless we believe that Christ made a false prediction in the first verse of this book! In Heb. 11.6, the author says, "...he that cometh to God *must* believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him." How confident are you that one *must* believe in God? To just that degree, what Jesus reveals in this book *must* come to pass shortly. Jesus "bookends" Revelation with a similar statement in Rev. 22.6, where Jesus said:

> These words are faithful and true: and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angels to show unto his servants the things which must *shortly* come to pass.

In verse 22.10, the book closes with a similar statement:

> And he saith unto me, Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand.

The word translated "shortly," *en takei*, means "quickly, at once, without delay." It's the word used in Ac. 12.7, where an angel of the Lord appeared to Peter in prison, "struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, 'Get up *quickly*.' And his chains fell off his hands." In Ac. 22.18, Paul relates Jesus' instruction to him after his conversion, as he planned to begin preaching in Jerusalem: "and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem *quickly*, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.'"

Other verses where this same term is used are found in Lk. 18.8, Ac. 25.4, and I Tim. 3.14. Nowhere does "shortly" mean anything other than "quickly, at once, without delay."

Thus, these statements in the first verse and two of the last verses of this book are *faithful and true*, and were about to be fulfilled shortly. This is certainly true, or Jesus both began and ended his book with

false predictions and statements, and we would have absolutely no reason to trust anything between the first and last verses of Revelation!

"Signified" means that the truths contained in this book are conveyed by signs and symbols which are not literally true, but signify things which are literally true. For example, the symbol $ isn't money, but it represents money. Even our currency is symbolic. It has no inherent value; it merely represents something that is valuable. Likewise, if we see a highway sign warning of a sharp curve ahead, the sign merely warns of something literal, though the sign isn't itself a sharp curve. It merely symbolizes or represents one.

The word "signature" comes from this same concept. My signature is a symbol which signifies something: Me. It's not me, but it represents me on checks, legal documents, and on the title page of this book.

We will see many symbols in this book, most of them with a background in the Old Testament prophets to help us understand their meaning.

1:2 who bare witness of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw.

The things that John saw in a series of visions were like a motion picture. John saw the graphic presentation, described it for his original audience, and it has been preserved for us. One old commentary described Revelation as "God's picture book." In modern parlance, it's more likely "God's YouTube," or "God's Movie."

The fact that John saw a graphic demonstration of the events in this book will help us determine to what degree we attempt to interpret the visions he saw. When we watch a movie, perhaps about the air war over Europe in World War II, how do we interpret each scene? In a dogfight between two fighter planes, do we focus in on the wings of the planes, analyze the pattern of rivets, speculate about their hardness, diameter, length, clearance, machining tolerances, etc.? Of course not. The producer of the movie never intended for us to bog down in the details of the air battle scenes. The same thing has been done to the scenes in Revelation. When we encounter a scene in one of John's visions, such as one involving fantastic beasts with four heads, ten horns, many eyes, etc., we'll understand that these creatures weren't literal, and we won't speculate about every detail. We'll try to determine the overall impression John was portraying.

1:3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein: for the time is at hand.

Here, a blessing (something fortunate, which will produce happiness) is pronounced upon those who read, hear, and keep the truths revealed in this book, again implying that the book can be read, be understood, and teaches truths that could be adhered to. Our goal in this volume is to understand it the same way its first century recipients did, as though we are standing in their shoes.

"At hand" again tells us that the things depicted and foretold in this book were to be fulfilled imminently, not in our time 2000+ years later. Something at hand was within their reach or grasp, not ours. This is the same word that Jesus used in Mt. 26.18, when Jesus instructed his disciples to find him a building in which to observe the Passover feast: "My time is *at hand*; I keep the Passover at thy house with my disciples." "At hand" here refers to the next day. In Mt. 26.45, he said, "behold, the hour is *at hand*, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." At hand here refers to that very night. You see the meaning. It doesn't mean way down yonder, ever. For other usage of *en takei*, please see Lk. 18.8, Ac. 12.7, 22.18, 25.4, Rom. 16.20, I Tim. 3.14, and Rev. 22.6.

John's Salutation vv4-7

1:4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits that are before his throne;

The Roman province of Asia in John's day was what we now call Asia Minor, or Turkey. It was where Paul had journeyed, taking the gospel to the Gentiles.

"Grace" is generally regarded as a Greek greeting, while "peace" is a Hebrew greeting. Grace expresses a wish that the one being greeted will receive gifts or blessings, while peace (Hebrew: *shalom*) expressed the desire that you would receive those blessings with no conflict.

The one "who is, was, and is to come" is undoubtedly God the Father, the self-existent one, who, when Moses asked him who he should tell the Israelites in the mudpits of Egypt who had sent him, said, in Ex. 3.14, "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." Not just I was, or I will be, but I AM.

The seven spirits that are before God's throne may be the Holy Spirit, the third person of the godhead, as the next verse is going to mention Christ. Paul tells us in Eph. 4.4 that there is one spirit, so these seven may symbolize the Holy Spirit in his completeness. Or, they

could be seven literal spirits in the service of Christ to John and the seven churches. Angels are "ministering spirits" (Heb. 1.7, 14). Thus, John may be greeting the churches of Asia on behalf of the father, son, and Holy Spirit, or from seven unidentified spirits serving around God's throne. We'll see a lot of "sevens" in this book; in the Hebrew mind, seven was the number of completeness, a combination of 3, the number of divinity, and 4, the number of directions on the earth, thus all heaven and earth, everything. We'll see this term used several times in Revelation.

The question naturally arises as to why in the context of the imminent judgment coming on Jerusalem, would John be writing to churches in Asia? The three major concentrations of Jews outside of Palestine at this time were in Babylon, Alexandria (in Egypt), and Asia. There were undoubtedly Jews in all those cities, and Paul went to their Jewish synagogues first on all his missionary journeys. What happens to Jerusalem is going to affect every Jew in the known world, and they needed to understand that the destruction of their capital, Jerusalem, wasn't just a coincidental event. Paul wrote the Thessalonian epistles to a Gentile church, but there were Jews in that church, and both Jew and Gentile Christians were persecuted by the Jews, as Paul mentions in those letters. The same is true in Asia as we'll see, and it was martyrs unavenged in the known world that were going to be avenged in Revelation.

1:5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth (Gr., *ge, land*)**. Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood;**

"Witness" is from the Greek word *martus*, the word for martyr, one who holds to his testimony as the truth even to the point of death. Jesus was, of course, such a martyr, and we'll see many Old and New Testament martyrs in Revelation.

Jesus is also the firstborn of the dead (plural, dead ones). Firstborn means first in either rank or time, giving us two possibilities for its meaning here. In Ps. 89.27, a messianic psalm, God the Father addresses the messiah as, "I also shall make him My first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth." Jesus wasn't the first king in time, but he certainly was the first in rank. Likewise, Jesus wasn't the first person in time to be resurrected from biological death; there were resurrections in the Old Testament, as well as in the gospels. Jesus had raised a number of people, including his friend Lazarus, so Jesus was not the

first one in time to be raised from the dead. All would agree that he was first in rank, the preeminent one of all who have been raised from biological death.

"Kings of the earth" here would invite special attention from John's readers as many of them were being persecuted by such kings, and wondering if God knew about their suffering. Jesus is introduced as the one who, regardless of appearances, is the king of those kings, the king who had all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28.28), who knows what every king is doing, good or bad, and has the authority to establish and remove kings.

The word "earth" is from *ge*, meaning dust, land, or ground, a word we'll see many times in Revelation. Many times we take it to be a reference to planet earth, but in the New Testament, it usually refers to the land, the land of Israel or Palestine, which had many kings in its six provinces. As many of those kings were involved in the persecution of faithful Jews and Christians there, those suffering saints would appreciate that Jesus was the king of those ungodly kings, and that he was going to avenge their suffering and death. Thus, they needn't be overly concerned about the vassal kings of the land of Israel, who were ruled by Rome.

1:6 and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father; to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

A kingdom is a government by royalty; it's not a democracy, nor a republic. Priests are people who are qualified to offer sacrifices acceptably to God. In Ex. 19.5-6, God had told Old Covenant Israel at their beginning:

> 5 Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.

The same terms are applied to Christians under the New Covenant, as we see in I Pet. 2.3-6, 9:

> 3 if ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious: 4 unto whom coming, *a living stone*, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious, 5 ye also, as *living*

> *stones, are built up a spiritual house*, to be a holy *priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 Because it is contained in scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion *a chief corner stone, elect, precious*: And he that believeth on him shall not be put to shame....9 But ye are an elect race, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

Paul had the same understanding in Eph. 2.19-21:

> 19 So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, 20 *being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone*; 21 in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a *holy temple* in the Lord;

Note that Christians perform their priestly duties in God's spiritual house, the messianic temple (which we'll see in Revelation 21) under Christ the High Priest, not the temple that was about to be destroyed in Jerusalem. The messiah's temple was built on him as the chief cornerstone. How inappropriate is it that futurists who hold to dispensational premillennialism are earnestly planning a new, third temple since the creation of the modern state of Israel in 1948? With unquestionable sincerity and enthusiasm, these people are fabricating utensils for use in this new temple, garments for their priests, and breeding red heifers to be flown to Israel for use in the restored temple worship. Of course, the Al Aqsa Mosque is built on the temple mount in Jerusalem, so dispensationalists and Zionists are foreseeing World War III between Muslims and Jews which will destroy the mosque and make possible the reconstruction of the messianic temple. None of these concepts is scriptural, and in particular, the messianic temple never was intended to be physical. (For more discussion of dispensational premillennialism and Zionism, please see Section 4, Chapters 17-24, "The Faithless Foundation of Dispensationalism," and Chapter 25, "Zionism," in the author's *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things*, available from Amazon.com.)

1:7 Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **shall mourn over him. Even so, Amen.**

"Coming on the clouds" would, to the Jewish Christians who first read this book, remind them of passages like Isa. 19.1, which says that God was coming on a swift cloud to Egypt. The context indicates that these were war clouds, indicating judgment on Egypt by Babylon. There are a number of examples of this language in the Old Testament, never to be taken literally of God riding on a physical cloud. In Jer. 4.13, speaking of imminent judgment on Judah by Babylon, Jeremiah says:

> Behold, he goes up like clouds, And his chariots like the whirlwind; His horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us, for we are ruined!

This passage depicts God in judgment as unstoppable as the clouds, as destructive as whirlwinds, and as swift as eagles. See other examples of God judging Israel and Jerusalem in Ezek. 34.12-13, Joel 2.2, and Zeph. 1.15. Simply put, the Bible never uses the expression "coming on the clouds" any other way! In Mt. 24.29-30, Jesus said he would be coming to destroy the temple in Jerusalem in his generation (v 34):

> 29 But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: 30 and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the *clouds of heaven* with power and great glory.

Jesus fulfilled this prophecy (if he didn't, he was a false prophet who deserved to be put to death under the Mosaic law!), and its fulfillment would cause all the tribes of the land to mourn, as Jesus says in Rev. 1.7. He came on clouds like his father had done throughout the Old Testament, in physical judgments on nations. In Mt.16.27-28, he had already said:

> 27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto

> every man according to his deeds. 28 Verily I say unto you, there are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

Coming "in the glory of the father" meant in the same manner the father had come, and notice the time element: *while some of his disciples were still alive!* We have some extremely old disciples around if Jesus didn't come back to judge Old Covenant Israel in his generation! Of course, the judgment he pronounced occurred when the Romans executed God's vengeance on Jerusalem in 70 AD.

"Every eye shall see him," in fulfillment of Zech. 12.10, is parallel to Jesus' statement to the Sanhedrin in Mt. 26.64, where Jesus threatened them with his coming in judgment in their lifetime:

> Henceforth ye [plural—SGD] shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.

So not only were some of Jesus' disciples going to live to see this coming in judgment, but also members of the Sanhedrin were, as well as the ones who actually put him to death on the cross. When they saw the destruction Jesus foretold at his coming in his generation, they were going to see his hand in it, and realize that he wasn't still dead, but was in fact living and sitting at the right hand of God, even though they couldn't see him literally with their physical eyes. *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*'s second definition of "see" is "to perceive *as if* by sight." The Sanhedrin would realize that the destruction they viewed wasn't happenstance, but the righteous judgment of God.

The tribes of the land would certainly mourn at the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. Recall Jesus' statement to the ladies witnessing his carrying his cross to Golgotha in Lk. 23.27-31:

> 27 And there followed him a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him. 28 But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. 29 For behold, the days are coming, in which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the breasts that never gave suck. 30 *Then shall they begin to say*

> *to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.* 31 For if they do these things in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

Notice the obvious parallels between Jesus' teaching in Mt. 24.30 and Rev. 1.7. Both passages teach 1) the coming of the son of man, 2) coming on clouds, 3) the tribes of the land mourning, 4) every eye seeing him, and 5) *in Jesus' generation!*

Divine Sanction v8

1:8 I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Many times God the father is called the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. In Isa. 41.4, and 44.6 he's called the first and the last, referring to his eternal nature. He's the one who is the primary mover, and the one who exercises judgment at the end of a matter. His eternal nature is also substantiated as the one who is, was, and is to come. He is the one who always was, is now, and always will be. He's the I AM, the self-existent one, as he instructed Moses to tell Israel at Sinai in Ex. 3.14. He's also the one who gave Moses the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 (as we saw in our introductory chapter), foretelling the end of Old Covenant Israel to avenge the blood of his martyrs in her last days, and he's the one that's going to bring about her destruction as unveiled in Revelation.

John's Circumstances vv9-10

1:9 I John, your brother and partaker with you in tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

"Partaker" comes from the word for fellowship which is joint participation toward a common goal. John is suffering with the Christians to whom he is writing. He's a partner in the kingdom of Christ. He's participating with them with a common motive. Paul had told brethren in Asia that "we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God," in Ac. 14.22. "Tribulation" means pressure. In Mt. 24.21, Jesus foretold "great tribulation" coming on the Jerusalem saints in his generation, when the city was besieged by the Romans.

John then says he was on Patmos, a small, nondescript island in the Aegean Sea, 50-60 miles from Ephesus. Tradition holds that he was banished there by Rome, but scripture doesn't say that. John does say he was there for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

This could mean that he was there in order to obtain the word of God, or it may have been because of the word, i.e., in punishment for his preaching. This is a distinct possibility in the context of the tribulation or pressure on him. In 6.9, we're going to meet some martyrs who were slain "for the word of God," and we'll see them again in 20.4, where it's stated they were beheaded "for the word of God."

1:10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet

Since John is having this theophany, this inaugural vision, "in the spirit" probably means "under the control of the Spirit."

The Lord's day is generally taken to be the first day of the week, Sunday, but scripture doesn't demand it. It also doesn't define or explain what the Lord's day is. In the author's early years of preaching in the northwest part of the United States, he frequently debated preachers from Sabbath-keeping denominations (Seventh-day Adventists, Seventh-day Church of God, Church of God Seventh-Day, etc.), on whether Christians were to observe the Sabbath commandment. I was happy to deny their affirmatives. On the other hand, when they wanted me to affirm that the Lord's Day was the first day of the week, I always respectfully declined to do so, because I couldn't prove it from the Bible. Over forty years later, I still can't. The term only occurs once in the New Testament, and that instance doesn't equate the Lord's Day with the first day of the week. We can't just assume it's the first day. Many *assume* that since Jesus was raised from the dead on the first day of the week (Mt. 28.1ff), that the Lord's day is the first day of the week. However, that's just another unprovable assumption. Some *assume* that since the Corinthians contributed to their local church treasury on the first day of the week (I Cor. 16.1ff), the Lord's day is the first day of the week. It's still just another unprovable assumption. Many *assume* that since the early church partook of the Lord's supper on the first day of the week, the Lord's day is the first day of the week. Again, it's just another unprovable assumption. (For more discussion on the Sabbath question, please see Chapters 13-15 in the author's *Denominational Doctrines: Explained, Examined, Exposed*, available from Amazon.com.)

F. I . Stanley, in his *As A Lamb Slain* affirms that the term isn't explained or defined:

> The term 'The Lord's Day was so well understood by all that it did not need an explanation. Why should it? Every Christian knew the day that belonged to the Lord. They knew the day of their covenant just as well as the Hebrew people know theirs. (F. I. Stanley, *As A Lamb Slain, A Unique Commentary on the Book of The Revelation* (Rogers, AR: F. I. Stanley, 1985, p. 41-43.)

If you wonder if Stanley's take on the covenant day of the Mosaic Law and the New Covenant smacks of the concept that Sunday is the Christian sabbath, your suspicions will prove correct. For now, we merely mention Paul's teaching in Rom. 14.5 that Christians could "esteem every day alike." There are no holy days in the New Testament. This certainly wasn't the case under the Law of Moses! We'll see more from Ignatius on this shortly.

Obviously, Stanley agrees with my take on the Lord's day, that it's not defined or explained in the Bible. His contention was that it didn't need to be because everyone knew it meant Sunday. Even if that were true, shouldn't we still be prepared to answer non-believer's questions about its meaning? Also, Sabbatarian groups wouldn't assent to Stanley's contention at all. I doubt that he ever debated any of them, nor was he prepared to if he didn't think scripture defined or explained the term.

Stanley continues:

> In fact, it was so well understood that only to mention it was enough for all to understand. To us, it is without question and beyond argument. (*Ibid.*, p, 43.)

This assertion won't set well with one who takes to heart Paul's command to "prove (test, examine) all things, hold fast that which is good, abstain from every form of evil (I Thes. 5.21-22), nor will it with one who is a child of light, for Paul commands in Eph. 5.8, 10:

> 8 For ye were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord: walk as children of light...10 proving what is well-pleasing unto the Lord;

Simply asserting that everyone understood the term "the Lord's day," the way Stanley understood it isn't proving what is well-pleasing to the Lord, and merely accepting such assertions isn't walking as a child of light. I know of no subject the Bible touches upon that is beyond question and argument. Do you?

Stanley then quotes from St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, in a letter to the church at Magnesia. Ignatius died in AD 107, so these words were probably penned in the latter part of the first century:

> Let everyone of you keep the Sabbath after a spiritual manner, rejoicing in meditation on the law, not in relaxation of the body, admiring the workmanship of God, and not eating things prepared the day before, nor using lukewarm drinks and walking within a prescribed space, nor finding a delight in dancing and plaudits which have no sense in them. And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's Day as a festival, the resurrection day, the queen and chief of all the days...If then those who had walked in ancient practices attained unto newness of hope, no long observing sabbaths but fashioning their lives after the Lord's day, on which our life also arose through Him and through His death which some men deny..." (Epistle to the Magnesians, ix, 1.v., p. 63, cited by Stanley, *op. cit.,* p. 44.)

If you think Ignatius makes a murky distinction between the sabbath and Sunday, again, your suspicions will be proven to be correct. Of course, Ignatius' statements that the Lord`s day was the resurrection day and the chief of all the days is language Stanley would like to find in the Bible, but cannot. This is the very thing lacking in the inspired text, and is hardly proving what is well-pleasing unto the Lord. It's what is well-pleasing to Ignatius and Stanley! Stanley then tells us what weight he assigns to the testimony of Ignatius:

> We feel that no greater proof can be given than the writings of these men who lived and worshipped in the time of the apostles...Since the Lord's day and the first day of the week were being used synonymously by the early Christian fathers during the first century, we see no reason why it should be questioned here. (*Ibid.*)

This author couldn't disagree more. Greater proof of the assertion that the Lord's day was Sunday would be a simple definition or explanation from scripture, which Stanley has admitted isn't there!

What credence should be attached to Ignatius' testimony? A simple survey of his doctrinal stands will help. Ignatius affirmed a single bishop in each city with assistance from the elders in the congregations of that city:

> Take care to do all things in harmony with God, with the bishop presiding in the place of God, and with the presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles, and with the deacons, who are most dear to me, entrusted with the business of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father from the beginning and is at last made manifest" — Letter to the Magnesians 2, 6:1

This in spite of the New Testament's teaching that bishops and elders referred to the same men (Ac. 20.17, 28).

He also affirmed the infallibility of the bishop:

> It is not lawful to baptize or give communion without the consent of the bishop. On the other hand, whatever has his approval is pleasing to God. Thus, whatever is done will be safe and valid." — Letter to the Smyrnaeans 8.

Ignatius' teaching formed a foundation of the Roman Catholic doctrine of apostolic succession, which they view a mark of the true church.

He was also a proponent of the doctrine of transubstantiation, that the bread and fruit of the vine in the communion becomes the literal flesh and blood of Jesus. Speaking of a congregation that didn't agree, Ignatius said:

> They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins and which that Father, in his goodness, raised up again. — Letter to the Smyrnaeans 6:2–7:1.

Ignatius was the first known Christian writer to argue in favor of Christianity's replacement of the sabbath with the Lord's day. Sabbatarians now gleefully quote the Roman Catholic Church's claim

that they changed the sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. Those who came out of Roman Catholicism in the Reformation Movement brought Ignatius' concepts with them. Later, those who abandoned their denominational allegiance in the Restoration Movement in the United States, brought Ignatius' concepts with them, as well. One has to ask, "When will those of us striving to be just Christians ever get all the Roman Catholicism out of our teaching?"

Is the Day of the Lord Equivalent to the Lord's Day?

There is a grammatical distinction between the two phrases, but it's a distinction without a real difference. For example, scripture speaks of the Lord's house and the house of the Lord, but no one thinks those two terms refer to different things. Scripture speaks of the servant of the Lord and the Lord's servant, but again, no one thinks those two things are different. Likewise with the will of the Lord and the Lord's will, the supper of the Lord and the Lord's supper, or the table of the Lord and the Lord's table. Isn't it just another assumption to assume that there's a distinction between the day of the Lord and the Lord's day, particularly when we're not consistent with it? Clearly, if we know what the house of the Lord is, we know what the Lord's house is. If we know what a servant of the Lord is, we know what a Lord's servant is. If we know what the will of the Lord is we know what the Lord's will is. If we know what the supper of the Lord is, we know what the Lord's supper is. In exactly the same way, if we know what the Day of the Lord is, we know what the Lord's day is.

Realizing this, when John says "I was in the spirit on the Lord's day," from our knowledge of the day of the Lord, we know what John meant. Likewise, in the rest of Revelation, we'll see further evidence of this same Lord's day. In Rev. 6.15-17, we see:

> 15 And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains; 16 and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: 17 for *the great day of their wrath is come*; and who is able to stand?

From our previous discussion in the introductory chapter of this quotation from Isaiah 2.2, 12, and 20-21," we know that these verses

are fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy of the day of the Lord in Old Covenant Israel's last days. Thus, it's also referring to the Lord's day in their last days. In Rev. 16.13-14, when John speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem at "war of the great day of God, the Almighty," this is another reference to the Lord's day. Similarly in Rev. 18.8, when Jerusalem's end finally comes, John will say:

> Therefore *in one day* shall her plagues come, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire; for strong is the Lord God who judged her.

Surely this "one day" is another reference to the day of the Lord or the Lord's day.

Also on the day of the Lord, in Ac. 2.20, Peter quotes Joel 2.28-32, referring to the destruction of Jerusalem *in the last days of the Mosaic age*, and uses the same apocalyptic language Jesus used in the Olivet Discourse when he says, "The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before *the day of the Lord* come, *That great and notable day*." Again, the term is used here of the destruction of Jerusalem when men called on the name of the Lord. In I Cor. 5.5, Paul commanded the Corinthians to withdraw fellowship from an impenitent fornicator, saying, "to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in *the day of the Lord Jesus*." Here, the term is used in the same way as Peter used it in the first gospel sermon, as it is in I Thes. 5.2, where he said: "For yourselves know perfectly that *the day of the Lord* so cometh as a thief in the night." The only day of the Lord we know of in the New Testament is the one coming on the Jews of the first century, and especially in Thessalonians, as avenging the martyrs at the destruction of Jerusalem. In II Thes. 2.2, Paul addressed that event again: "to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that *the day of the Lord* is *just at hand*."

The KJV and ASV introduce confusion into this verse with the expression "just at hand," which makes it sound like Paul was correcting their misunderstanding about the near coming of Jesus. The phrase translated "just at hand" is actually in the perfect tense. Literally, the phrase is "has already happened." The Thessalonians were not confused because they thought the coming of the Lord was *near*, it was because *they thought it had already occurred*! In essence, they thought the entire Christian age lasted only 20 years, yet as we've seen, the age

of the Messiah was to have no end (Isa. 9.6-7 Lk. 1.33). To be sure, as we've already seen in Mt. 16.27-28, Mt. 24.29, 34, Heb. 10.37, Jas. 5.8, and Rev. 22.10, 12, Jesus and his apostles taught that his return was near, but the Thessalonians thought the Lord had come! That's what the text says.

Again, the popular view of the return of Christ, that every eye will see him, the dead will come forth from their graves, a universal judgment will occur, and the planets and stars will be burned up, doesn't fit this text at all. If your preacher announced that the day of the Lord had occurred yesterday, and the Lord returned, the dead were raised, the earth burned up, and the stars, too, wouldn't you think it was time for the straitjacket to come out? Do you suppose the Thessalonians really believed that Christ had come (though none of them saw him), that the resurrection had taken place (although the cemeteries were all still intact), the judgment had taken place (though none of them had participated), and the planet had burned up (though they were still walking around on it)? They actually believed none of this, yet they thought the Lord had returned. Obviously, their concept wasn't the popular one of today. This alone should convince us that we might need to go back to the drawing board with our concepts of the return of Christ, don't you think? (For a full discussion of the eschatology of Thessalonians, please see Appendix 5, "The Eschatology of Thessalonians" in the author's *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things.*)

The last New Testament passage containing the day of the Lord is found in II Pet. 3.10, where Peter says:

> But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

There are three sets of "heavens and earth" in this text, the first before the flood, the one Peter was living under, and the new heavens and earth that would replace the one Peter lived under. In no case did the term refer to the planet and stars. We live on the same planet and under the same stars that Peter and Adam did! The term heavens and earth represented a covenantal system. In addition, we popularly take "elements" in this passage to be atomic elements, yet every other time the word (*stoichion*) is used, it refers to the fundamental elements of the law of Moses! For a full discussion of this passage, please see Chapter

5, "II Peter 3: Destruction of the Universe or Jerusalem?" in the author's *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things*.)

One last usage of the day of Jehovah is found in Zech. 14.1-2, again, in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem:

> 1 Behold, *a day of Jehovah* cometh, when thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. 2 For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

All six passages which use the term "day of the Lord" refer to a day of judgment on a city or region on the earth, which is exactly how John is going to describe the harlot Babylon, and its replacement by New Jerusalem. Babylon is identified in Rev. 11.8 as "where the Lord was crucified." In Rev. 18.24, Babylon was destroyed because "in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that have been slain upon the earth (*ge*, lit., land—SGD). As we noticed in the introductory chapter, Moses, Isaiah, Jesus, the author of Hebrews, John, and Paul made clear that Jerusalem was going to be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets in his generation! Jerusalem was destroyed to avenge the martyrs on the day of the Lord.

Notice that John heard "a great voice as of a trumpet." In these visions, everything concerning heaven and God's throne is going to be great, contributing to the augustness of the scene. It's not the weak voice of a pipsqueak, but a great voice as of a trumpet. The trumpet was used in war to indicate assembly, alarm, celebrations, a call to attack, retreat, etc. Paul, in I Cor. 14.8 said, "For if the trumpet give an uncertain voice, who shall prepare himself for war?" As we saw in the introduction, this book is concerned with a war of vengeance Christ was going to bring against Old Covenant Jerusalem; thus a great voice of a trumpet would be appropriate to get John's attention. In 16.14, John speaks of "the war of the great day of God the Almighty." The day of the Lord was to be a time of war. If we were to hear a siren right now, it would get our attention: is it a fire engine? A police siren? An ambulance? A tornado? An atomic attack? Whichever, it would get our attention like this trumpet got John's.

Christ Among the Lampstands vv11-20

1:11 saying, What thou seest, write in a book and send it to the seven churches: unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

John is instructed to watch the scenes he's going to be shown and write them in a book which was to be sent to seven churches in Asia. These churches aren't all the churches in Asia, but a representative sample. Many of the strengths and weaknesses of these churches can be found in churches now.

1:12 And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And having turned I saw seven golden candlesticks;

We're going to see in v18 that this is Jesus ("I was dead, and am alive forevermore") and that these candlesticks belong to the seven churches. The fact that they're gold shows the value Jesus puts on his church. They're not some cheap alloy purchased at a discount store. These candlesticks, or lampstands, as they're called in some translations, are probably standing on the floor, holding a bowl of oil with a wick floating in it, as Jesus is walking among these lampstands.

1:13 and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto a son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle.

A son of man is a man, a human being. We're going to see that this human-looking person is none other than Christ, and we see him clothed in a dignified kingly or priestly fashion.

1:14 And his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;

We're not going to speculate about how large Jesus' girdle was, or why John said "white wool" instead of red silk. Be impressed that Jesus' head and hair made for an august appearance, and his hair was pure white, also part of his dignity.

We see similar pictures of the awesomeness of heavenly scenes in Dan. 7.9 where we see the Ancient of Days on his throne for judgment. and Dan. 10.7, where we find a scene similar to this one in Revelation 1, as well as the famous scene in Ezekiel's inaugural vision. After a long description of fiery clouds, glowing metals, and fantastic creatures around God's throne with many faces, wings, etc., they moved on

wheels with rims full of eyes all around. We could spend days speculating about what all those figures meant, but it is better to let Ezekiel tell us what he concluded. In Ezek. 1.28, he summarizes it all by saying:

> Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking

That's it. Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord. By inspiration, that's what God impressed on the prophet. When we see a similar inaugural vision in Revelation, we see the same thing: the glory of God and of Jesus Christ. Coincidentally, when Stephen made his defense in Ac. 7.55, and was being stoned for it, Luke says he looked steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God. What do you think he saw? I think he saw the same thing that Ezekiel and John did in their inaugural visions

His eyes were penetrating, having the ability to pierce like a flaming torch. This picture reminds us of Heb. 4.13, where we're told:

> And there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Momentarily, Jesus is going to be using this penetrating gaze to analyze and tell these seven churches that he knows exactly what is going on within each one of them. He knows because he's standing among them and can see their true condition.

1:15 and his feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace; and his voice as the voice of many waters.

Burnished brass is that strengthened by fire. With such legs, Christ isn't someone that you can kick the props out from under. He's unshakeable. His voice is like Niagara Falls. If you've been there, you know how the ground shakes all around the falls, and you're impressed with the power that's there, just as John is in this vision. This fellow is not to be messed with.

1:16 And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

So Christ is at the right hand of God, and the stars are in the right hand of Christ. We'll see momentarily that the stars are associated with

the seven churches. In 2.16, Jesus will say that he will make war with his enemies with the sword of his mouth. This sword is not the gospel, but is a large broadsword that he will use to slaughter his enemies. In 19.15, we'll see Jesus going forth on a white horse making war with the sword of his mouth and treading out their blood in the winepress of God's wrath. He's about to come back to defeat the enemies that had put him and many of his saints to death.

Remember Jesus' countenance as John sees it. He doesn't see an effeminate face as Jesus is many times depicted, but a face as powerful as the sun at its peak.

As a young physics student, I remember pointing a spectrometer at the corona of the sun to measure the light spectra. I was being extremely careful not to view too close to the sun itself. My lab partner jostled the table the viewfinder was on so that the lens pointed directly at the sun. I only looked at it for the smallest fraction of a second, but I thought I was permanently blinded. When we're tempted to watch an eclipse of the sun, we're advised to watch it through smoked glass, or a pinhole camera—anything to avoid looking directly at the sun. We can't look at the sun, even for a second. If you have, you can't read these words! John said that Jesus' visage was like that—beyond the ability of man to withstand its brightness.

1:17 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last,

John's reaction is common to human beings in the Bible confronting even angels. Those seeing them either fall down like they're dead, or they want to worship them. Usually the first thing that angels say to humans is, "Fear not." Angels, and Christ here, have an appearance that doesn't encourage anyone to walk up to them, slap them on the back, and ask them how they're doing. They're always awe-inspiring beings, and Jesus has that same effect on John. Daniel had this same experience in Dan. 8.15-17, 10.10-19.

In saying, "I am the first and the last," Jesus makes the same claim to deity that is made of his father. He is eternal, and he's both the cause and end or goal of everything. As Paul says in Col. 1.15f:

> 15 ...who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16 for in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions

> or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and unto him;

John's falling as one dead in his inaugural vision is like Isaiah's reaction to his in Isa. 6.5, where Isaiah said, "Woe is me! for I am undone." He felt like he'd had it; he couldn't stand it.

If you walk into a blacksmith shop, and you pick up a horseshoe that you don't know is hot because it's no longer glowing red, you'll drop it instantly, grab the burned hand with your other one, and hop up and down, saying, "Ow, ow, ow." Do you know why you do that? There's no law that says you have to. You may never have seen anyone else do that, so why do you suppose you do that? It's because it feels better than anything else! Likewise, John fell like a dead man because it felt better to him than anything he could do at the moment.

Jesus is depicted as a powerful being here, so powerful that he lays his hands on John to comfort him, letting us know that we should never doubt Jesus' ability to carry off the future he's depicting in Revelation.

1:18 and the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

Jesus was dead and is now alive. I believe that Jesus died twice on the cross, first spiritually when he said, "My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?" Jesus believed God forsook him. God's forsaking him, abandoning him, leaving him in the lurch as he carried the guilt of the sin of all mankind was the death that Adam incurred in the garden, the death of his fellowship with his father. Second, he died biologically when he gave up his spirit or expired. Either biologically or spiritually, he was dead, but will never be again.

To have the keys to anything means you control it, whether a house, car, or a deposit box at the bank. Hebrews 2.14-15 tells us how Jesus obtained the authority over death and hades:

> 14 Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage

Death could be either biological or spiritual death, and hades is the realm of the unseen. Jesus controls any kind of death, and anything in

the unseen realm. In 20.14, we'll see both death and hades destroyed by being cast into the lake of fire.

1:19 Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which shall come to pass hereafter;

Again John is told to write what he sees, whether in the past, present, or hereafter. Hereafter should be interpreted in the context of 1.1, 3, as occurring quickly or about to come to pass. He's not going to be concerned with things in the distant future.

1:20 the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks are seven churches.

So now Jesus is uncovering the fact that the seven stars are the angels (messengers, either human or spiritual) of the churches, and the candlesticks are the churches. The fact that these churches are in Christ's hands shows his involvement with his people. At the present time, we see commercials for an insurance company saying, "You're in good hands with Allstate." Perhaps, but here we realize that we're in the best hands of all, those belonging to Jesus Christ.

Chapter 2

The Letters to the Seven Churches – 1

Ephesus 2.1-7

Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation contain seven brief letters dictated by Christ to seven churches in Asia. We will say a little about each of the cities in which these churches are located, as the character of a city often has significant influence on the character of a church in that city.

For instance, the city of Corinth was a seaport city, and like modern seaports, the society was idolatrous and very corrupt. As a result, the church in Corinth was also very corrupt. As a matter of fact, Paul said that the Corinthian church was so immature and carnally minded that he never had and never would permit them to support him financially. On the other hand, the city of Philippi was a city in Macedonia populated in large part by Roman military veterans, and as such, they were men of integrity, honor, and dependability. Paul permitted them to support him financially from their very beginning as a church. The

character of the cities in large part determined the character of the churches.

This may be true of the church and city where you are. When I was a young Christian, I was raised in the Texas panhandle, in the Bible Belt. In that area, there were very few admitted atheists. A businessman who admitted he was an atheist couldn't survive in business in that area in the 1950s-1960s. As a result, the churches in the area rarely did any teaching on evidences for the existence of God and the inspiration of the Bible.

On the other hand, when I got out of college and moved to the Northwest United States, I found an entirely different situation. Not long after I arrived in Seattle, one of the Seattle newspapers published a survey revealing that 70% of the people in the Seattle area professed no belief in God whatsoever. I couldn't believe my eyes! Consequently, churches in the Seattle area did a lot of teaching on evidences, and the first public formal debate I engaged in was with a PhD in the humanities department of Washington State University who was also the faculty sponsor for the League for the Promotion of Militant Atheism. Had I remained in Texas, there would have been no such debate, and I certainly wouldn't have been prepared to participate in it.

The city of Ephesus in New Testament times had both a harbor and highways so that it was "the most easily accessible city in Asia" which "favored its religious, political and commercial development, and presented a most advantageous field for the missionary labors of Paul ... Ephesus and Pergamos, the capital of Asia, were the two great rival cities of the province ... It is to the temple of Diana, however, that its great wealth and prominence are largely due."(*ISBE, "Ephesus"*)

There are several things to notice about each letter:

Christ's Salutation

Christ's Self-Designation

Christ's Commendation

Christ's Condemnation

Christ's Command to Repent

Christ's Exhortation

Christ's Promise

As the churches will differ in their condition and circumstances, these 49 items will differ among the seven churches, and will cover

about every circumstance a church might find itself in. We'll also see that although Christ addressed these letters to individual churches, he intended for all churches to consider these matters, and see how they fit these conditions.

2:1 To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, he that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks:

Ephesus was a large rich city, having a population in Paul's time of several hundred thousand. It had burned to the ground several times and each time, the city was so affluent it could rebuild itself with no outside or government aid. It was the home of a wonder of the ancient world: the magnificent Temple of Diana. It was a socially liberal city, and a refuge for criminals, somewhat like our cities of San Francisco and New Orleans.

The church in Ephesus began by Paul's preaching on his third missionary journey. He had stayed there two years, "so that all they that dwelt in Asia (our province!) heard the word of the Lord, and believed, both Jews and Greeks" (Ac. 19.10). That same account reveals that they had been persecuted at the hands of the Jews, their primary persecutors.

The Greek word translated "angel" here simply means a messenger, whether human or heavenly. It's the same word used of the messengers of John the Baptist in Lk. 7.24. In II Cor. 8.23, Paul refers to:

> Whether any inquire about Titus, he is my partner and my fellow-worker to you-ward, or our brethren, they are the *messengers of the churches*, they are the glory of Christ.

These angels or messengers were serving the churches of Macedonia and Achaia on Paul's third missionary journey by delivering the benevolent collections to the needy saints in Judea.

If the church where I labor sends me to another part of the nation or world to give them a message, that makes me an angel, and my wife is married to an angel!

The city of Ephesus was the Roman capital of the province of Asia, and was the closest to Patmos, from where John wrote Revelation.

The messengers of the seven churches that Christ dictated these letters to were probably human messengers that carried the letters from John on Patmos to each of these churches.

The one who held the seven stars in his right hand was Christ, the one who is sitting on the right hand of his father. The intimate relationship between Christ and his churches is shown by his holding them in his hand, and walking among the candlesticks which were the churches themselves. Because of his presence among them, he was qualified to make the following statement:

2:2 I know thy works, and thy toil and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try them that call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false;

Christ claims that he knows the works of the Christians in Ephesus, how hard they've toiled and exercised patience. Many of us labor on our jobs, but not all of us toil. Toil is extremely burdensome back-breaking labor. They've born up during difficult circumstances and haven't wavered

Christ also commends this church for not tolerating evil men. The Ephesian Christians tested men who claimed to be apostles, and when they were imposters, they found them false.

In II Cor. 11.13-15, Paul spoke of such false apostles:

> 13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ. 14 And no marvel; for even Satan fashioneth himself into an angel of light. 15 It is no great thing therefore if his ministers also fashion themselves as ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works.

In II Cor. 12.12, Paul spoke of the usefulness of the signs of an apostle for detecting those who were false:

> Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, by signs and wonders and mighty works.

Signs of an apostle would include the compatibility of their teaching with that of Jesus and his original apostles. Did those claiming to be apostles have the qualifications Matthias had in Ac. 1.22? Could they perform the miracles that authentic apostles did? Did they have the ability to lay hands on brethren and impart miraculous spiritual gifts as Simon the sorcerer realized in Ac. 8.18-19?

> 18 Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, 19 saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit.

The Ephesians were accustomed to testing teachers who approached them, and not tolerating those that didn't measure up to Christ's standard. They had the knowledge of God's will required to perform such tests, and the maturity mentioned in Heb. 5.13-14:

> 13 For every one that partaketh of milk is without experience of the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. 14 But solid food is for fullgrown men, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil.

2:3 and thou hast patience and didst bear for my name's sake, and hast not grown weary.

So this church had a lot going for it, but Christ also knows them well enough to require some correction.

2:4 But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love.

Here's a church that Christ commends because they cannot bear evil men, but something's wrong. They've left their first love. It's not that they no longer love Christ, but something about that love is lacking. Perhaps Ephesus has become like a married woman who started out in marriage with diligence, emotional involvement, wanting to stimulate her husband, ravishing him with her love, and building their home with zeal. After the years have gone by, she's fixing the same meals, making the same beds, yet her heart is no longer in it. Her love has turned cold.

Many of us do that spiritually, don't we? We still love Christ, but we no longer have our hearts in it; we're not as fervent as we used to be. We're no longer as emotionally involved with our Lord as we were at the beginning. Christians do this, and churches do it, as well.

I'm sure many readers can remember starting a new congregation, perhaps because the previous one had grown too large, and starting a new work was exciting. We were small in number, but spiritually, we were lean and mean, and trimmed to our fighting weight, so to speak. The excitement was there, we weren't going to tolerate any deadwood, any nonsense, and there were no hiding places for lukewarm Christians

to hide. We would defend the truth against all challengers, debate any issue at the drop of a hat, and not turn our backs on any problem.

As the church grew in numbers, we weren't depended on as much as before, there were members who became lax, and there were now places for them to hide their talents. After more time, we weren't as zealous to defend the truth any more, as there were plenty of others to do it. We no longer welcomed a spiritual issue that needed to be aired out in a debate. Our initial ardor had cooled considerably.

In Jud. 2.7-11, Joshua died at the end of his long, successful career, and Israel was highly successful. They had entered the promised land and accomplished the goals God had set for them. Then we're told that another generation arose that knew not God. We've seen this in congregations after great success, where the children of the founding generation don't have near the fervor their parents had. It doesn't have to be that way, if the children return to their first love.

Individual Christians do this, and churches do as well. Perhaps that's what had happened to Ephesus. It had a grand history, but it had lost its first love. So Christ tells Ephesus the remedy for their state:

2:5 Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.

First, he tells Ephesus to remember where they used to be, and how they had departed from their first love. Then they were to repent, change their mind—their view of their previous situation and the present one, then do their first works, do what they did in their lean and mean beginnings. Even though the Ephesian church had been successful in the beginning, they were in serious trouble, so serious that if they didn't change their mind and their course, Christ was going to remove their candlestick. He would no longer be in their midst, in fellowship with their works. Notice: it's *repent, or else!*

2:6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Christ here commends the Ephesian Christians for something many people think has no place in the way of Christ: they hate! They hate the works of some false teachers or brethren. Who the Nicolaitans were hasn't come down to us, so it's evidently not important for us to know that. Whatever bad teaching or behavior they engaged in isn't the critical thing. The proper attitude toward it is. It is to be hated, despised.

In Ps. 97.10, the Psalmist wrote:

> Hate evil, you who love the LORD,

One of the products of our love for the Lord is to hate that which is opposed to him. Many times we don't hate evil as much as we should because we don't love the Lord as much as we should.

In Ps. 119.104, 127-128, we read:

> 104 From Thy precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way...127 I love Thy commandments Above gold, yes, above fine gold. 128 Therefore I esteem right all Thy precepts concerning everything, I hate every false way.

In Ps. 36.4, David describes the wickedness of men:

> He plans wickedness upon his bed; He sets himself on a path that is not good; He does not despise evil.

One of the great faults of an evil man is that he does not despise evil! The Ephesians were to be commended in that they despised the works of the Nicolaitans. Do we who love Jehovah, despise evil? As one elderly preacher who was one of the author's mentors used to say, "If you love roses, you have to hate the weeds."

What parent who loves his child doesn't hate the disease that wracks his body? Cancer must be hated when it threatens those whom we love.

The Ephesians still understood that their love of God demanded they hate teaching and practice opposed to Him, and Christ commends them for it.

2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

Who has ears? Don't we all? It's highly possible to have ears, yet not hear, as Jesus admonished the Jews of his day in Mt. 13.13. If so, whether we're members of the church at Ephesus or not, we need to hear what the Spirit says to the churches, about hating evil and about staying with our first love.

Notice the word "overcometh" here. It is a truly important word in Revelation. We're going to learn how faithful martyrs overcame all their trials and tribulations, the same way Christ did. Most importantly, we're going to learn how we can be overcomers or conquerors as well. We'll have much more to say on this concept later.

The overcomers will get to eat of the tree of life. The word "tree" here is literally, wood, and most of the time it's translated "wood," referring to dead wood, as a beam, a stick, or a cross (Ac. 5.30, Gal. 3.13). It's not the normal word for tree. As the tree of life in Eden was available to Adam so he could live forever, the cross of Christ is the source of our eternal life now. Eden is in the context here in the term Paradise of God. Paradise literally comes from a Persian word meaning a royal garden, We'll see Paradise again in 22.1. When Jesus told the thief on the cross, "Today, you'll be with me in Paradise," he was referring to the royal garden of God. The overarching theme of the Bible is "The Tree of Life Lost and Regained," lost in Genesis 2, regained in Revelation 22.

Smyrna vv8-11

2:8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things saith the first and the last, who was dead, and lived again:

In contrast to the church at Ephesus, about which we have much information in the New Testament, we know nothing of the church in Smyrna. The city itself was about the same size as Ephesus and a highly successful trade center.

Christ's self-designation to Smyrna is the first and the last, a term applied only to deity in the Bible. We saw this term applied to Christ in 1.17-28, where again he referred to himself as one who "was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore." This self-designation is related to the exhortation Jesus is going to give them in v10, and we'll discuss it more there.

2:9 I know thy tribulation, and thy poverty (but thou art rich), and the blasphemy of them that say they are Jews, and they art not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Again, since Jesus is among the candlesticks, he knows what's going on in Smyrna. "Tribulation" means pressure, and it is many times translated affliction. As we noticed in the introductory chapter, the Thessalonian Christians were under pressure from the Jews, and Jesus promised them relief when he returned, which was imminent. If he hasn't come yet, the Thessalonians never got their relief!

Christ assures these Christians that he's aware of their poverty. The word here indicates extreme grinding poverty, where one lacks even the necessities of life.

Although uniquely, Jesus doesn't give this church any condemnation at all, he then greatly commends them for their riches. He says that even though they are poor physically and financially, as far as true riches were concerned: in faith, works, and in spirituality, they were a tremendously successful church. Any church would be glad to get such a commendation. In Lk. 16.11, Jesus had spoken of the distinction between physical possessions and spiritual ones:

> If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?

The Christians in Smyrna were aware of this distinction, and had come down on the right side, acquiring true riches. They were also enduring Jewish persecution. Part of this persecution was the blasphemy of the Jews.

Blasphemy means "speaking against." We normally associate it with blasphemy of God, but it means the same thing when one person reviles another. In this context, the Jews who were persecuting Christians in Smyrna were reviling them, slandering them, perhaps to the government to multiply their troubles, or to their employers, to get them fired.

Jesus points out that their persecutors called themselves Jews when they really weren't. They called themselves Jews to indicate that they were God's people, yet Jesus says they were anything but. The Jews thought Christians were blasphemers, and that they were following Jesus, who, in their view, was the greatest blasphemer of them all. In contrast to that, Paul said of the Jews in Rom. 2.28-29:

> 28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: 29 but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

In Phil. 3.3, Paul again speaks of the distinction between true and claimed people of God:

> for we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh:

Thus Paul makes clear that the real Jews, Israelites, or people of God are not physical Jews, but Christians.

Jesus then reveals what these ungodly Jews really are. Rather than being the real people of God, they are a synagogue of Satan. A synagogue is an assembly, a bunch of people. The word satan refers to any adversary or opponent. Moses even called God a satan in Num. 22.22, as God was an adversary to sinful Balaam at the time. Many times, we hear Arabs and Muslims in the middle east refer to the modern state of Israel as a satan, and the United States as The Great Satan, as they view both nations as their adversaries. Thus, Jesus says these Jews persecuting the Christians in Smyrna are not the people of God, but a bunch of adversaries.

2:10 Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.

Since the Christians in Smyrna had suffered persecution, reviling, and grinding poverty for their faithfulness to Christ, they may have been dismayed when Jesus mentioned further imminent (about to occur!) suffering, and that they were not to fear it. There's more coming!

Your adversary, the devil, is *about to* (note the imminence again - SGD) cast some of you into prison, perhaps through the false accusations of the Jews. One reason the Smyrnans shouldn't fear, but might have feared is because they might be tried, put to the test. Of course, trying the faithful only leads to better faith, doesn't it? In I Pet. 1.6-7, Peter says:

> Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold trials, 7 that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ:

So rather than fearing such trials, Christians should greatly rejoice at them, realizing that any dross material will be burned off as their faith is smelted and purified, thus more valuable.

It's interesting that I Peter and Revelation were written to the same Christians. In I Pet. 1.1, Peter addressed "...the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion in "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." All these are provinces in what we now call Asia Minor. The-

se are the same people being tried in Revelation, except that Peter says his audience has already been put to grief in manifold trials, and John says the persecution and trial of his audience is imminently to occur. It appears that I Peter was written AFTER Revelation was, as was II Peter, since Peter says it was written after I Peter (II Pet. 3.1).

Jesus then speaks of their sufferings as tribulation which will last ten days. This may have been ten literal days because of some suffering about to be loosed on them by a Roman magistrate coming to town, or it may mean a small length of time in contrast to the 1260 days of tribulation then coming on the Jews in vengeance for the blood of all their martyrs, as we discussed in the introductory chapter, and as we'll see a number of times in later chapters of Revelation.

Dr. Jesse E. Mills, Jr., in his *Revelation - Survey and Research*, mentions another possibility. He points out that...

> ...Nero after building his golden house traveled through the provinces and plundered the temples to provide for his riotous living. (*International Cyclopedia, 1900 ed., vol. 10*, p. 397, cited by Mills, p. 14.)
>
> ...in A. D. 67, Nero arrived in Asia Minor, where he slaughtered for money, and in Ephesus plundered the temple of Diana, taking all the items of value. (*Guizot's Ancient History*, 1844 Edition, pp. 262-265, cited by Mills, *Ibid.)*

It's possible that Nero, being so close by in Ephesus at the time of John's writing, may have been the instigator of Smyrna's problems as well.

Jesus then exhorts the Smyrna Christians to be faithful unto death, that is, even to the point of death. You are to be faithful even if it costs you your life. In Lk. 14.26-27, Jesus had taught this obligation while on earth:

> 26 If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, *yea, and his own life also*, he cannot be my disciple. 27 Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

Similarly, Jesus had taught in Mt. 16.25:

> 25 For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it.

We can now better appreciate Christ's self-designation to Smyrna. He's been dead, and is alive again, and can advise them on being faithful unto death. If you're in tax trouble with the IRS, and I try to encourage you not to fear them, and you ask me, "Sam, have you ever had any tax troubles?" If I say, "No, I've never even been audited," you're not likely to think I can really sympathize with you. On the other hand, if I tell you, "Your wouldn't believe the tax troubles I've had. I get audited every year, they go over my returns with the fine-tooth comb, but I've withstood their every charge," you will be ready to accept my encouragement to not fear them.

So with Jesus here. Here's someone who has been dead, who has conquered the realm of death, has the keys of death and hades, and he's telling these Christians not to fear what's coming. He's been there, he conquered death, he controls the realm of death, and he knows what he's talking about.

He promises them that if they are determined to be faithful unto death (they may not have to die, but they must be ready to), he will give them the crown of life. The word crown here is from *stephanos*, a victory crown that athletes are awarded at the Olympics, not the *diadem*, or crown of royalty that a king wears. When an unknown Olympic swimmer makes years of preparation, and wins 5 gold medals, he's famous overnight and is headed for years of riches, fame, and entry to the upper echelons of society, isn't he? That's what Jesus promises to those who are victorious over the pressures their persecutors are heaping upon them.

2:11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Jesus closes this letter to Smyrna with an exhortation to listen and do what he tells them. We've already said that "overcoming" is an important concept in Revelation. It comes from the Greek word *nikao*, a conqueror or victor. It's the word that Nike athletic shoes came from. Let's introduce it a little more. In Rev. 5.5, Jesus is spoken of as an overcomer:

> 5 and one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of

> David, hath *overcome* to open the book and the seven seals thereof.

When Jesus asks his followers to be overcomers, conquerors, or victors, he's not asking us to do something he hasn't done himself. In Rev. 12.9-11 we're told how victorious Christians did it:

> 9 And the great dragon was cast down, the old serpent, he that is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world; he was cast down to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him. 10 And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying, Now is come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accuseth them before our God day and night. 11 And they *overcame* him because of (1) the blood of the Lamb, and (2) because of the word of their testimony; and (3) they loved not their life even unto death. (Numbers added–SGD)

NOTE: They overcame Satan! It can be done, and we'll learn well how to do it in our study of Revelation. Overcomers in the first century did so so because (1) of Christ's blood, (2) they held to the word of their testimony, and (3) they loved not their life even unto death. That's what it was going to take for the Smyrnans to be victorious.

So the first motive for being an overcomer is to get the crown of life. The second motive is to avoid the second death. The second death is defined in no uncertain terms in Rev. 20.14, where after the judgment,

> And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, even the lake of fire.

We'll talk about the lake of fire when we get to Revelation 20. Those willing to suffer death for their faith in Christ will not be in danger of the second death. On the other hand, Rev. 21.7 says they will receive everything God has promised to them:

> He that *overcometh* shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

Pergamum vv 12-17

Pergamum was a major city in Asia, about the size of Ephesus. It was a great commercial center, and a beautiful city, of which its citizens were proud. Pergamum had a great library of several hundred thousand volumes, centuries before the printing press was invented. Every volume in the library had to be hand-written.

The library in Pergamum rivaled the library in Alexandria, Egypt, to the degree that the Egyptians threatened to cut off Pergamum's supply of papyrus, a paper made out of a certain kind of reed widely available in Egypt. To counter this, the people of Pergamum invented vellum, a specially-tanned young animal skin which was a suitable writing surface for books or scrolls. This product of Pergamum was the origin of our modern parchment, a contraction of Pergamum's charts, an invention of which its citizens were justifiably proud.

Pergamum was also a great religious city with a great many idolatrous temples, and its idolatry is something Jesus will refer to in his letter to the church in this city. When people design their own religion, historically they include all their desires, including their sexual proclivities, so that many idolatrous religions include a great deal of sexual sin. Jesus will address both these matters in his letter to the church in Pergamum. With these things in mind, let's go to Jesus' letter to the church in Pergamum.

2:12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These things saith he that hath the sharp two-edged sword:

Jesus' self-designation in these letters is usually related to what he's going to exhort each church to do, and this letter is no exception. When he refers to himself as the one that has the two-edged sword, his sword is going to be something he threatens this church with if they do not repent. We've seen this sword before in 1.16, where we saw the introductory vision of Jesus. Now, Jesus wants them to know that he's the one with the sword and that he's qualified to use it.

2:13 I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is; and thou holdest fast my name, and didst not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth.

Even though we know nothing of the church in Pergamum other than what is revealed in this letter, Jesus knew the situation there. He was among the churches of Asia and knew their circumstances, their

behavior, and their spiritual condition. Thus, he begins by stating that he knows where they dwell, and characterizes Pergamum as where Satan's throne is. With so much idolatrous worship with its attendant immorality, it's truly said that Satan dwelled there. It's not his headquarters, but it could certainly be said that he was in control of such a city. As Jesus, his father, and the Holy Spirit are said to be in fellowship and dwell in those who follow their teaching (II Jn. 9-10), Satan is said to dwell in those who do not.

Many times we may face such corruption in our locale that we are tempted to move out to the edge of civilization to escape all corruption, but it's not nearly that easy. I remember in the early 1970s when I was a young preacher and was invited to preach the first time in Alaska. I recall having dinner one evening with a banker, and we were talking about corruption in society. He told me that he had learned that even in Alaska, you couldn't get away from society far enough to escape all corruption. He told me he had been working on a banking project around the state that necessitated his flying all over the state. One day he flew into Point Barrow, on the Arctic Ocean, and as far away from civilization as you can get. The airport there at the time was just a gravel strip, and once he deplaned, he walked about a half mile over to the street going into Point Barrow. At the end of the street, he saw a couple of schoolboys, about ten years old, who were smoking dope under the streetlight. It hit him, and me, that here he was, at the end of the world, and yet the dope dealers were there, too! There was no escaping their clutches. The solution to the problem doesn't lie at the end of the earth: it lies in one's faithfulness to the values the Lord wishes him to live up to.

Jesus then commends the Christians of Pergamum for holding fast to and not denying his name, even in the event of great unpopularity and opposition in such an idolatrous center, especially in the days of Antipas, a faithful martyr (Gr. one who holds to his testimony even to the point of death) in that city. We know nothing of Antipas other than what is stated here. Since it's so rare that real names are given of characters in Revelation, it's easy to suspect that the name is typical, a generic name, especially since it means, literally, "against everyone." It may be that he is a historical character, or that Jesus is speaking of all his martyrs there, who in such an immoral city, would naturally be opposed to nearly everyone. It shouldn't matter to us, but we do want to particularly note that Jesus is speaking of martyrs in Pergamum.

Since Jesus gives the church in Pergamum quite a commendation, his next words may be somewhat surprising.

2:14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication.

The few things Jesus condemns at Pergamum are indeed serious. Some are holding to (note: not "teaching") the teaching of Balaam. Balaam was a compromising prophet of God in Numbers 22-24, who aided the involvement of the Israelites in idolatry and immorality. Here, Jesus accuses some in the church at Pergamum that are compromisers like Balaam, and are involving Christians there in idolatry and immorality in the same manner

2:15 So hast thou also some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner.

We don't know anything of the Nicolaitans, but Jesus says that in the same manner, there are some in the church at Pergamum who hold to (again, not teach) their teaching as well, which also encourages their idolatrous and immoral activity. This response is exactly what Christians who think it's just fine to hold to erroneous teaching as long as they're not teaching it need. Again, II Jn. 9-10 apply.

Of course, Christians in a predominantly Gentile area like Pergamum would be susceptible to both idolatry and immorality, and had been since the gospel began to be taken to the Gentiles by Paul. In Ac. 15.20-29, the apostles met in Jerusalem to condemn requiring circumcision of Gentile Christians, but they encouraged them to abstain "from the pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from what is strangled, and from blood." Clearly, idolatry and immorality (both acceptable in Gentile idol worship) was a major concern for Gentile Christians, like those in Pergamum. Later, Paul wrote in I Corinthians 8 that idols were nothing, and offering sacrifices to idols didn't taint the meat because there was no god up there, and offering meat to nothing didn't alter it one whit. In I Cor. 8.7, Paul said:

> Howbeit there is not in all men that knowledge: but some, being used until now to the idol, eat as of a thing sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

Thus, Paul's instruction was to use caution in Gentile areas to use wise judgment concerning eating meat offered to idols to help Gentile Christians avoid violating their conscience. These were the very problems now confronting the Christians in Pergamum, and the compro-

misers were causing much damage in the church there. So, Christ demands they stop doing it and repent. Later in his discussion of idolatry and immorality in I Cor. 10.7-8, Paul taught them as Christ teaches the Nicolaitans here:

> 7 Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. 8 Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.

2:16 Repent therefore; or else I come to thee quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth.

So, "Repent, or else," Christ tells them, and if they don't, Christ will quickly come to the compromisers, idolaters, and immoral, and take care of the problem himself in their lifetime. He's coming to "them" quickly! He will make war with them with the sword of his mouth, the sword of the vision that has now become a threat to the church at Pergamum.

2:17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it.

Jesus concludes his letter to the church in Pergamum by urging them to hear his rebuke.

The overcomers (conquerors, victors) would be those who held to Jesus' teaching strictly, not by compromising like Balaam and the Nicolaitans. To the overcomers, Jesus would give hidden manna.

Hidden manna is manna that the world doesn't know about nor understand. Manna was a substance God miraculously provided to the children of Israel as they exited Egypt and headed toward the land of promise. It was a type of the spiritual/physical food God provided them under the Mosaic covenant. We see God providing the prophet Ezekiel with this food at the beginning of his work in Ezek. 3.1-3:

> 1 Then He said to me, Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. 2 So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. 3 And He said to me, Son of man, feed your stomach, and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving

> you. Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth.

Before Ezekiel was prepared for the mission God had planned for him, he needed God's word to become part of him. Ezekiel said that consuming God's word was sweet as honey. Indeed, learning God's word is one of the sweetest experiences of life. Putting it into practice can be not so sweet, as we'll see in Rev. 10.8-11, as John was given this same experience. In this chapter, John sees a great angel with his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and he had in his hand a little book. John is told:

> 8 And the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard it again speaking with me, and saying, Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel that standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. 9 And I went unto the angel, saying unto him that he should give me the little book. And he saith unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but in thy mouth it shall be sweet as honey. 10 And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and when I had eaten it, my belly was made bitter. 11 And they say unto me, Thou must prophesy again over many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.

So before John was prepared to preach further, he had to eat the book of God. Eating it was sweet, just like it had been for Ezekiel, but teaching it to others became a bitter experience for him.

After feeding the 5,000, Jesus had taught much this same lesson concerning manna and true bread of heaven in Jn. 6.48-52:

> 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread which cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. 51 I am the living bread which came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: yea and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world. 52 The Jews therefore strove one with another, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?

When Jesus claimed to be living bread, and spoke of the necessity of his disciples eating him, the Jews wondered if he was speaking of cannibalism. Indeed, it was rumored that early Christians were practicing cannibalism. In verse 53, Jesus continued:

> Jesus therefore said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves.

Then, speaking of himself as the living bread which came down out of heaven, he said in verse 58:

> This is the bread which came down out of heaven: not as the fathers ate, and died; he that eateth this bread shall live for ever.

Many people think these verses are speaking of the Lord's supper, yet Jesus specifically denies such in verse 63:

> It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: *the words* that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life.

Jesus wasn't speaking of the Lord's supper when he said we must eat him, but his words which are spirit and are life. Even if our Roman Catholic friends are right in their doctrine of transubstantiation, that the cup and loaf are changed into Jesus' physical flesh and blood, Jesus said *the flesh profiteth nothing!* If this passage isn't teaching that we must eat the words of Christ to have life, what in the world does it teach? He's speaking of the preparation we must make by consuming his teaching and making it a part of every aspect of our lives. Many Christians don't appreciate this, and non-Christians don't appreciate it at all. It's indeed hidden manna to them.

Jesus also says that he will give a white stone with a new name written on it. We aren't told the significance of the white stone. It might be a stone used to determine the life or death of a prisoner, with white indicating mercy or sparing the prisoner, or a vote up or down in some tradition that isn't revealed here. Also, Jesus simply doesn't reveal to John what the new name for his overcomers is.

Thyatira vv18-29

Thyatira is one we know very little about. It wasn't a large city, nor a commercial center like Ephesus and Smyrna, yet it received the longest letter from Jesus in Revelation. Evidently, the main thing Thyatira was noted for was its large number of labor unions, or guilds. Many of these guilds had their own pagan gods, and at their banquets, union members would offer wine to their gods, and then engage in debauchery as part of their idolatrous worship. This of course caused Christian workers a great deal of problems. If they didn't participate in the idolatry and immorality, their livelihood would be at risk.

2:18 And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like unto burnished brass:

Jesus' self-designation is taken partially from the introductory vision of chapter 1, and usually it is chosen to fit the situation in the church to which the letter was addressed. Here he mentions his penetrating vision which enables him to know the situation in Thyatira, and his feet are of the strongest metal known at the time, showing he was solid, stable, and able to stand and do the job that needed to be done there.

2:19 I know thy works, and thy love and faith and ministry and patience, and that thy last works are more than the first.

Jesus assures the church in Thyatira that he knows well the situation there. This is a repetition of what he had said in Mt. 10.29-30, when he said:

> 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? and not one
> of them shall fall on the ground without your Father:
> 30 but the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

If he knows the condition of sparrows, and when we comb our hair, he's aware of how many hairs fall into the sink and how many are left on our scalp, he certainly is qualified to know what's going on in the hearts and lives of every Christian and every church.

He knows the love of the church in Thyatira, and its desire to act in the best interest of everyone: its friends, its enemies, its Lord, and its God. He knows their faith, their confidence in Christ which drives their work or ministry, and produces the patience required to endure tribulation.

The church in Thyatira wasn't like the church in Ephesus which needed to repent and do the first works, as their last works are more than the first. Let's be assured that if Jesus was qualified to know and make judgments about the internal characteristics of a church in a mediocre little town in Asia in the first century, he's certainly qualified to know and make judgments about the church in our city. What do you suppose he sees? What comments would he make about the church we work in? What would he see and think about the work of each Christian in it? Would he praise us for growing like Thyatira, so that our last works are better than our first? What do you see in yourself? How's your growth been the last ten years? Do you know more, love more, have more confidence in Christ, have more patience, or do you just take those things for granted? Where do you suppose these things will be ten years from now? Jesus knows the spiritual condition of each of us, and of the church where we work.

Many times in my preaching career, students would get excited about what they were learning, even to the extent that they would worry whether they knew enough when they were baptized. When someone approached me questioning their state of knowledge at the beginning of their life for Christ, I always thought it was a good sign, a realization that they were learning. Do you ever have that question? If you do, it might be a good sign that your last works are better than your first. Even though you may not know your true spiritual condition, or don't reflect on it, Jesus most assuredly does!

It's interesting that Thessalonica was a church somewhat like the one in Thyatira. It was being persecuted by Jews, yet Paul tells them in II Thes. 1.3-4:

> 3 We are bound to give thanks to God always to you, brethren, even as it is meet, for that your *faith* growth exceedingly, and the *love* of each one of you all toward one another aboundeth; 4 so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your *patience* and *faith* in all your persecutions and in the afflictions which ye endure.

Thus, like the Christians in Thyatira, the Thessalonians were growing exceedingly in their faith, love, and patience, even in the midst of persecution, but....

2:20 But I have this against thee, that thou sufferest the woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess; and she teacheth and

seduceth my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols.

Even though the Christians in Thyatira were growing in many significant ways, Jesus needed to rebuke them somewhat. We've seen in every one of these letters thus far that Jesus commends the churches before he takes them to task for their shortcomings. He assures them that though they have weaknesses, there's much about them that is commendable, thus encouraging their further progress.

Jesus condemns their collective permission to a false prophetess Jezebel. Prophetesses did exist in the first century church, but this one taught and behaved outside the teaching of Christ. Jezebel may have been her real name, but it's more likely that Jesus speaks of her metaphorically as the Jezebel of the Old Testament, who was the wife of King Ahab who introduced the worship of Baal to Israel. She was so notorious that to this day, right-thinking people don't name their daughters Jezebel any more than they name their sons Adolf Hitler.

The church at Thyatira had the means and responsibility to test Jezebel's claim to be a prophetess, as John instructed in I Jn. 4.1:

> Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

Yet they were unwilling to do that: instead she granted permission for her to continue her licentious ways as she taught and seduced Christians at Thyatira to follow her example of immorality and idolatry.

2:21 And I gave her time that she should repent; and she willeth not to repent of her fornication.

Jesus exhibits his mercy in giving Jezebel time to change her mind, as he gives individuals, churches, and even nations time to discover his teaching, learn it, and obey it. Even when disobeyed, Christ gives time for his subjects to come around in their thinking. Many scriptures remind us of Christ's desire not to punish, but to be merciful to those who disobey him. In Rom. 2.3-6, Paul says:

> 3 And reckonest thou this, O man, who judgest them that practise such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? 4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God

> leadeth thee to repentance? 5 but after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up for thyself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; 6 who will render to every man according to his works

Likewise Peter assures us that God wants us to learn, obey, and repent rather than face judgment in II Pet. 3.9:

> The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

God's goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering were involved in Jezebel's case, but she wasn't willing to repent. Despite some of our Calvinist friends' insistence that man doesn't have free will, Jesus evidently didn't know that, because he thought Jezebel "willed not to repent;" that simply wasn't what she wanted to do. She made a willful decision not to take advantage of God's mercy

2:22 Behold, I cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of her works.

So, since this fornicator likes beds so much, Christ is going to cast her and the ones who follow her teaching into another bed, not a literal bed of fornication, but a figurative bed of great tribulation, affliction and pressure, unless they too decide not to take advantage of God's mercy and change their minds as well.

2:23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he that searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto each one of you according to your works.

Jezebel's children would be her followers. Killing them with death is an emphatic construction (a child might say, "I'm so thirsty I'm going to die!"), meaning to utterly destroy them.

If this happens, then all the churches (probably the churches of Asia) will know that Christ is responsible, that their judgment wasn't just a coincidence or random event.

They will know that Christ is the one that searches the reins and hearts. The word translated "reins" here is literally, "kidneys," which were viewed as the emotional center of man, and the heart was the intellectual center. Jesus affirms that when he judges the children of Jez-

ebel, people will realize that he's aware of their intellectual status as well as their emotional status. Many times we speak of "having butterflies" in our stomach when we're nervous. Literally, there are no butterflies, and they wouldn't be in our stomach in any event.

Jesus' ability to judge the reins and hearts of those at Thyatira is what qualifies him to render to every man according to his works.

While on earth, Jesus had said he was coming back during the lifetime of some of his disciples and judge every man according to his works. In Mt. 16.27-28, he said:

> 27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and *then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds*. 28 Verily I say unto you, there are *some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death,* till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom

Likewise, Jesus had said in Mt. 24.29-30 that he was coming back on the clouds of heaven, and in verse 34, he said it would be fulfilled in his generation. The judgment scene of Matthew 25 also took place in that generation, the same time element as Jesus' teaching here in Revelation 2. Of course, the time element in Revelation 2 is given in 1.1, 3 and Rev. 22.6, 10, 12 ("Behold, *I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is...*"), and 20. (For further detail on the Olivet Discourse, particularly the connection of the time element in Matthew 24 and 25, please see Appendix 2, "The Olivet Discourse.")

Next, Jesus addresses the faithful in the church at Thyatira.

2:24 But to you I say, to the rest that are in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, who know not the deep things of Satan, as they are wont to say; I cast upon you none other burden.

"The rest" are the ones who have not this teaching; they're not involved with Jezebel's teaching nor behavior.

Jesus' statement of the faithful not knowing the "deep things" of Satan, as the Thyatirans were wont, or accustomed to saying, indicates something about Jezebel's teaching. In the first century, the Gnostics were false teachers who mixed together esoteric or advanced knowledge, elements of the Mosaic Law, and other teaching, into a system of superior knowledge, as they viewed it, and they looked down their noses at those who didn't hold it in high esteem. Though their doctrines were from Satan, they probably didn't market it that

way, rather as superior knowledge, advanced knowledge, etc. Evidently this was true of Jezebel and her followers. Though their teaching was Satan's, they marketed it as "deep things," advanced, superior knowledge. They should have been seeking the deep things of God, as were the faithful there. We see such marketing of false doctrines now. Some will say, "If you really want to fight Satan, you need to know more about what he's trying to get people to do. If you want to fight drunkenness, you need to know a little more about it, perhaps get drunk yourself, so you can see how it feels. If you want to fight adultery...and if you don't, you're just a shallow thinker." Jesus commends these for not thinking this way.

Thus, to the faithful, Jesus will throw upon them no other burden. They're holding fast, they're faithful, they're not misled by Jezebel. They need no further obligation.

2:25 Nevertheless that which ye have, hold fast till I come.

So, you're doing fine, and hold it fast until I come.

If you don't think Jesus has come yet, after 2000+ years, do you think the faithful in Thyatira are still holding fast, and will continue to do so for as many more centuries as it takes? Or do you think everyone Jesus addressed there is dead? I think they're dead, every last one of them. The coming Jesus mentions here is the same one he promises in Mt. 16, 24, and Rev. 22.7, 12, and 20. It's the same coming and judgment discussed in v23.

2:26 And he that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations:

Again, the overcomers are those victorious over the influence of Jezebel and those who permit her to exercise that influence. They are the ones who will be faithful unto "the end."

"The end" of what? Of time? The term "end of time" occurs nowhere in the Bible, Old or New Testaments. The concept is nowhere considered in scripture. "The end of Christ's age"? Again, Christ's reign has no end, Isa. 9.6-7, Lk. 1.33.

How about the end of the Mosaic age? Moses had foretold the end of Old Covenant Israel in Dt. 32.20. Jesus had said he was coming at the end of the Mosaic age, Mt. 24.3, 6, 13-14, 30, 34. Surely the Christians in Thyatira could and undoubtedly did hold fast until Christ came to judge Old Covenant Israel in AD 70.

Jesus then promises the faithful that he would give them authority over the nations. As John said in Rev. 1.5, Jesus was the ruler of the kings of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) when he wrote Revelation. If he's

reigning, those who are faithful are reigning with him: they're on the winning side! In the next presidential election, if a democrat wins and reigns, the other democrats will reign with him! So with Christians reigning with Christ. In Rom. 5.17, Paul said:

> For if, by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; much more shall they that receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness *reign* in life through the one, even Jesus Christ.

In Eph. 2.4-6, Paul again alludes to the faithful reigning with Christ when he says:

> 4 God, being rich in mercy, for his great love where-with he loved us, 5 even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), 6 and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus:

We'll see this same truth taught again in Rev. 5.9-10:

> 9 And they sing a new song, saying, Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou was slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood (men) of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, 10 and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they *reign* upon earth (Gr. *ge*, land).

We'll be commenting on their reigning with Christ as we proceed through the book. Suffice it to say now that Jesus is assuring the Christians at Thyatira that they will reign with him if they hold fast to him.

2:27 and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers; as I also have received of my Father:

In Psalm 2.7-10, a messianic psalm, the messiah is set forth as a ruler of the nations:

> 7 I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee. 8 Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, And the very ends of the earth (Heb, *eretz*, land) as Thy possession. 9 Thou shalt

> break them with a rod of iron, Thou shalt shatter them like earthenware.

This psalm is quoted in Ac. 4.25-26 and Ac. 13.43-44 and applied to Christ after his resurrection, and now in Revelation we see that overcoming saints are reigning with him as he also received of his father.

2:28 and I will give him the morning star.

When Jesus says he will give the overcoming saints at Thyatira the morning star. We don't have to guess what the morning star is, for in Rev. 22.16, we're told:

> I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star.

Thus, to the faithful, Jesus says, "I will give him me"! This is an expression of fellowship Jesus will have with the overcomers.

2:29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

And with the admonition to all the churches to hear what he's just said to the church at Thyatira, Jesus concludes his letter to the church at Thyatira.

Chapter 3

The Letters to the Seven Churches – 2

Sardis 3.1-6

3:1 And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead.

Sardis was another great commercial center of Asia like Ephesus and Smyrna. The conjunction of five major roads of the Roman empire undoubtedly led to its prominence. Several hundred years before Christ, King Croesus of Sardis was possibly the richest person in the world, and was noted for coining the first money in the known world, largely to reduce his wealth to currency he could travel with and store. Of course, we think that coining money is commonly done by national governments, but in Croesus' time; it was a novel idea. Prosperity and Sardis seemed a natural fit.

Jesus' self-designation as the one who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars is taken from his introduction in Revelation 1.

Claiming complete access to diety, he then assures this church that he knows their true condition. This letter is a little unusual in that Jesus gives no commendation before he condemns them. We've commented before that the psychological approach Jesus used in these letters nearly always commended churches before he issued a condemnation. However, our Lord was evidently at a loss in the case of the church at Sardis. He could find nothing to commend!

Jesus then states that the church in Sardis has a reputation of a living church, that it was active, working, and evidently vigorous and dynamic. This would have been fine, except that the one who really knew their works and their real condition knew their great reputation was

devoid of truth. He knew they were dead spiritually. They weren't alive at all, even to the degree that diety could find nothing about them to commend.

In I Tim. 5.6, Paul spoke of a similar situation of an individual. Speaking of widows, he says:

> But she that giveth herself to pleasure is dead while she liveth.

That is, she was dead spiritually while she was alive biologically, just like the church in Sardis was, all things considered, just null and void. This could apply to churches of our day in any respect of our work together. We might have a great reputation as a praying church, a singing church, a teaching church, yet if God detects a lack of faith or godliness, or our teaching is fruitless because we're learning or teaching others with improper motives or adherence, our reputation is all for nought. We might have a fine reputation, but the church itself is as dead as a doornail. How much better to trust in how God sees our church than to trust in the esteem of men!

This is a lesson highly applicable in our time, when men emphasize their works, and ballyhoo their activity and busyness, rather than the things God has ordained for local churches to do. Thus, Jesus urges a different course of action for the church in Sardis.

3:2 Be thou watchful, and establish the things that remain, which were ready to die: for I have found no works of thine perfected before my God.

The New International Version appropriately translates the first phrase as "Wake up!" They'd better be alert to their true spiritual condition, to their drifting away from the Lord's way, and decay, rather than relying on their reputation.

Watchfulness is something Christians and church leaders should be exercising at all times in any event. In Ac. 20.28-31, Paul tells the elders from the church at Ephesus:

> 28 *Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock*, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples

> after them. 31 Wherefore *watch ye*, remembering that by the space of three years I ceased not to admonish every one night and day with tears.

Jesus then tells the church at Sardis to stabilize the few things which are still alive there, but which are on the verge of dying. The urgency is that Jesus can find "no works of thine perfected before my God."

What a sad statement to have to make about a church that evidently had set goals, yet hadn't perfected, or completed, any of them. Setting goals, then starting to fulfill them, is usually an exciting thing for churches to do. Doing the legwork to complete them may be something else entirely, particularly after the work has gotten difficult, and many of the workers have fled the project. It's exciting for a congregation to bring on a new preacher, perhaps an easy way to enhance a church's reputation, yet when the going gets rough, many will no longer stand with him. Lots of churches make lots of big splashes, starting projects they don't complete, and when it's all over, they just did a lot of splashing.

Individual Christians can do the same thing. Do you start projects in your service of Christ that you don't complete? Would it be possible for Christ to ask you for anything that you have perfected before his God? Do you think that setting goals in our service of Christ is important? How about completing them? Even if you don't, Jesus evidently does care what your goals are and whether or not you complete them.

In II Pet. 1.5-7, Peter exhorts Christians of his time in this same vein: After rehearsing how they had obtained their precious faith and righteousness in vv 1-4, in language much as Jesus uses of the church in Sardis, he admonishes them to develop what are normally called Christian virtues:

> 5 Yea, and for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply virtue; and in your virtue knowledge; 6 and in your knowledge self-control; and in your self-control patience; and in your patience godliness; 7 and in your godliness brotherly kindness; and in your brotherly kindness love.

Examine yourself and see if you have added these things to the precious faith and righteousness you had at the beginning of your new life. If you haven't, then hear what Peter says in vv8-9:

> 8 For if these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For *he that lacketh these things is blind*, seeing only what is near, having forgotten the cleansing from his old sins.

Do you set yourself goals to study certain books of the Bible seriously, then fade away after the hard work of study catches up with you? Do you resolve to develop your abilities to teach others, then not follow through with the hard work of preparation? If individual Christians or churches have problems completing such projects, here's the solution:

3:3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and didst hear; and keep it, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

We should remember how we heard the gospel, received salvation, and the joy we had at the outset of our service to Christ. If we've lost it, we need to reflect on how that happened, and repent, change our mind so that it doesn't happen again. Realize that setting goals and accomplishing them is important to our Lord and adapt the mindset that we're going to think about them like he does.

Jesus warns that if the church in Sardis doesn't adopt his solution, he will come as a thief, that is, in an unexpected judgment. Whether this is a specific judgment on just that church, or part of a more general judgment that we're going to see on the Jewish nation as we proceed through the book, Jesus says "thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

This certainly seems to indicate that this judgment is coming on this church specifically, in their lifetime, but the hour of this judgment is not given. It depends on their reaction to Jesus exhortation.

3:4 But thou hast a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments: and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy.

In contrast to the church in Pergamum, who had a few compromisers, Sardis only has a few that are faithful. What about churches where many are corrupt, but only a few are faithful? Will Jesus tell them to go somewhere else? What about you if you find yourself in a dead church with a good reputation? What is your hope? Jesus says, "they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy."

White is the color of purity. In Isa. 1.18, God said, "Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow." In Rev. 7.14, we'll see Christians whose robes are white because they washed them in the blood of the lamb, and in 19.8 we'll see that bright linen is the righteous acts of the saints. These few faithful are worthy, not the dead ones.

3:5 He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

The overcomers in Sardis will be the ones who trust Christ more than they trust their reputations. They will not be blotted out of the book of life, the register God has always kept of those who are in fellowship with him. We see glimpses of God's book throughout the Bible. In Ex. 32.32, Moses has come down from Mt. Sinai with the tablets of stone to find Israel involved in full-blown calf worship. After executing 3000 of the people, Moses called for the people to dedicate themselves to God anew, He then asked God to forgive the people, and said:

> But now, if Thou wilt, forgive their sin–and if not, please blot me out from Thy book which Thou hast written! 33 And the LORD said to Moses, Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.

In Phil. 4.4, Paul says that his fellow-workers are in that same book. Here, Jesus says that the overcomers will not be blotted out of that same book, which indicates they were in it, but that it's possible for one to lose his salvation (Our Calvinist friends, insist on "once saved, always saved"). In Rev. 20.16, Jesus says those not in the book of life will be thrown into the lake of fire, which we'll discuss fully later.

Indeed, Jesus says he will confess the name of the overcomer to his Father. He will be their advocate! Jesus had said in Mt. 10.32-33:

> 32 Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven. 33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Would God save this person whom he blots out of his book even though Jesus denies him before the Father?

3:6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

Jesus again indicates he wants all the churches to hear and adhere to what he's said to the church in Sardis.

Philadelphia vv7-13

3:7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and none shall shut, and that shutteth and none openeth:

It's interesting that Christ's self-designation in this letter is not based on his image in chapter 1, but rather comes from prophecies in the Old Testament in reference to David. First, he claims to be the one that is holy; he is set apart entirely for the service of God, and is not involved in anything that isn't part of that service. He is also the one that is true, the true one that there's nothing artificial about.

To have the key of David is to have the authority of David. In Isa. 9.6-7, Isaiah foretold:

> 6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. 7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On *the throne of David and over his kingdom*, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

In Lk. 1.31-33, the angel Gabriel told Mary:

> 31 And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. 32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him *the throne of his father David*: 33 and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Jesus was the messiah because he was of the lineage of David (through both Joseph and Mary) and since his resurrection, he's been ruling from the throne of David, as Peter established in the first gospel sermon. In Ac. 2.23, Peter accused the Jews in his audience, "...him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay"; they, of course, wouldn't deny it because they were proud of it! In opposition to what they had done, here's what God did (v24):

> ...whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

Then Peter affirmed from David that the messiah would be resurrected (v27):

> Because thou wilt not leave my soul unto Hades, Neither wilt thou give thy Holy One to see corruption.

In vv30-31, Peter establishes Christ's rule from David's throne since his resurrection:

> 30 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins he would set one upon his throne; 31 he foreseeing this spake of the resurrection of the Christ.

In Revelation, Jesus speaks of the authority he wields from David's throne. It's the same authority he spoke of in Mt. 28.18:

> All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth.

Since he has all authority and is reigning on the throne of David, he can claim that it's "he that openeth and none shall shut, and that shutteth and none openeth." To open and shut doors is to grant and take away opportunities or access. In I Cor. 16.8-9, Paul says that he's not coming to Corinth immediately because he's going to tarry at Ephesus:

> 8 But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost; 9 for a *great door* and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.

In Acts 19.13-16, Luke tells a humorous story recounting what was going on in Ephesus at that very time:

> 13 But certain also of the strolling Jews, exorcists, took upon them to name over them that had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. 14 And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, a chief priest, who did this. 15 And the evil spirit answered and said unto them, Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye? 16 And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and mastered both of them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. 17 And this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, that dwelt at Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

This incident may very well be the great and effective opportunity Paul had in Ephesus. As a result, Luke tells us in vv 19-20:

> 19 And not a few of them that practised magical arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all; and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So mightily grew the word of the Lord and prevailed

Thus thousands of people in Ephesus are now paying attention to Paul and he cannot turn his back on them. In II Cor. 2.12, Paul mentions another great opportunity, this time in Troas:

> Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ, and when a door was opened unto me in the Lord,

These are just two of the doors that Jesus had opened and none could shut. On this basis, Jesus now gives his estimation of the church at Philadelphia.

3:8 I know thy works (behold, I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut), that thou hast a little power, and didst keep my word, and didst not deny my name.

Of course, more than anyone else, Jesus knew the church there, and tells them that he has set before them a door opened which no one can take away from them.

That they have a little power could mean that they weren't a large church, perhaps few in number, yet they have been faithful, having kept his word, never denying his name by getting involved in the great amount of idolatry in their city. With Jesus as their powerful king who can grant them opportunities, and their faithfulness in taking advantage of them with their little power, they can still accomplish great things.

3:9 Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, of them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

Like he had told the church in Smyrna (2.9), Jesus mentions the assembly of false Jews there, and says that he will make them come and worship before their feet. The things which are going to happen to these Jews during the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, prophesied by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse, will convince them that the destruction of Old Covenant Jerusalem wasn't just a coincidence, but was actually Jesus judging them because of their national rejection of him as the Christ, thus vindicating the people of God.

In I Cor. 14.23-25, Paul instructs the Corinthian church to not permit tongue-speaking with no interpreter present, and he addresses the reaction of unbelievers in such cases, just as Jesus is in our present passage:

> 23 If therefore the whole church be assembled together and all speak with tongues, and there come in men unlearned or unbelieving, will they not say that ye are mad? 24 But if all prophesy, and there come in one unbelieving or unlearned, he is reproved by all, he is judged by all; 25 the secrets of his heart are made manifest; and so *he will fall down on his face and worship God, declaring that God is among you indeed.*

In my earlier years of preaching in the northwest United States, I publicly debated sabbatarians (those who bind Sabbath-keeping on Christians) many times. I've pointed out that the Sabbath was commanded only to Jews, as a memorial of God bringing them out of Egypt by his power, and Sabbatarian denominations don't remember the Sabbath as their independence day from Egypt. If I were somehow

to become convinced that Christians now should keep the Sabbath, I would do the same thing before Sabbatarians now that Jesus says these false Jews would be doing in Revelation, bowing and scraping before them, and apologizing for all the things I've said about them, and admitting that they were right all along!

3:10 Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth (Gr. *ge*, land).

The Philadelphia Christians had kept the word of Christ's patience, that is, his patient endurance of opposition and persecution that had come upon him from these false Jews. Now, Jesus promises to keep them from the hour of trial or testing, which was (lit.) *about to come* upon the whole world. "World" here is from *okiumenee* meaning not the planet or globe, but the known world, the Roman empire. This is easily seen in Lk. 2.1, where the same word is used:

> Now it came to pass in those days, there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that *all the world* should be enrolled.

The whole world is that affected by a decree from the Caesar: the Roman Empire. In 13.1-3, we'll see a huge crisis in the Roman empire, that would certainly affect those living on "the land" of Palestine, as we'll see. The purpose of the imminent judgment coming on these Jews wasn't to test the Philadelphians, but on them that dwell in the land (Gr. *ge*) of Palestine. Destroying the capital of Old Covenant Israel would affect Jews scattered throughout the known world.

As we saw in the letter to the church at Smyrna, the letter of I Peter was written after Revelation.

3:11 I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown.

This judgment upon Old Covenant Israel was imminent, so Jesus said he was coming quickly (from *en tachei*, which he will reinforce at Rev. 22.7, 12, and 20). Jesus wasn't mistaken about this, as those who deny he was coming imminently are.

This being true, he admonishes Philadelphia to hold fast, "hang in there," we'd say, so that no one would take their crown (Gr. *stephanos*, victory crown).

Jesus gives no condemnation to this small, faithful church.

3:12 He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out thence no more: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and mine own new name.

The overcomers at Philadelphia would be those not involved in the pervasive idolatry of their city, and those who wouldn't cave into persecution by false Jews. Jesus promises to make these overcomers pillars in God's temple. This isn't the physical temple in Jerusalem, no longer God's house, but the false Jews' house ("Behold, *your house* is left unto you desolate," Mt. 23.38), but the new messianic temple built by Christ. His temple would never be destroyed, so those faithful to him would never have to escape from it for their lives.

A Few Remarks on the Messianic Temple

Another concept needs clarification: that of the Messianic Temple, the temple that Christ built to replace the second temple destroyed by Titus. Of course, many religious denominations think the messiah's temple hasn't been built yet, but that since the creation of the modern state of Israel in May 1948, the time is coming soon. In spite of many false predictions of Christ's return since 1948, they believe that a physical temple will be rebuilt, with Mosaic sacrifices restored, and the Levitical priesthood restored for those sacrifices. With unquestionable sincerity and enthusiasm, these people are fabricating utensils for use in this new temple, garments for their priests, and breeding red heifers to be flown to Israel for use in the restored temple worship. Of course, the Al Aqsa Mosque is built on the temple mount in Jerusalem, so dispensationalists and Zionists are foreseeing World War III between Muslims and Jews which will destroy the mosque and make possible the reconstruction of the messianic temple. None of these beliefs can be backed up with scripture, and in particular, the messianic temple never was going to be physical.

In Isa. 28.16, Isaiah foretold that after the destruction of the Old Covenant temple, God would build the new temple on a special foundation:

> therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone of sure foundation: he that believeth shall not be in haste.

In this passage, Christ was the stone upon which his temple or church was going to be built, not Peter as some suspect in Mt. 16.18 ("Upon this rock I will build my church" and it would never disappear or be destroyed). The reader will surely realize that this passage is quoted as being fulfilled in the first century. Paul quotes it as fulfilled in Rom. 9.32-33 as he explains why disobedient Jews didn't arrive at the righteousness available to them in Christ as he identifies Christ as the precious stone that God used for the cornerstone of his messianic temple:

> 32 Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by works. They stumbled at the stone of stumbling; 33 even as it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence: And he that believeth on him shall not be put to shame.

Likewise, in I Pet. 2.3-6, Peter refers to Christ the cornerstone of the messianic temple as he also quotes Isa. 28.16 as fulfilled:

> 3 if ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious: 4 unto whom coming, a living stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious, 5 *ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house,* to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 Because it is contained in scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: And he that believeth on him shall not be put to shame.

Thus, Peter also understood that first century Christians were in the messianic temple, along with the apostles, all built upon the foundation stone that God had provided. They were the messianic temple! They understood that God and Christ were dwelling in them—his temple. Peter understood better than anyone else that he wasn't the stone the church or temple was built upon!

Paul had the same understanding in Eph. 2.19-21:

> 19 So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, 20 *being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone*; 21 in whom each several

> building, fitly framed together, groweth into a *holy temple* in the Lord;

Thus, writing to a predominantly Gentile church, Paul understood that they were the messianic temple foretold by Isaiah, into which all nations would flow. Obviously, a restored physical temple in our time is far from what the Bible portrays as the messianic temple.

Connecting the Messiah's reign with David again, we note in Amos 9.11, where Amos foretold:

> In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David,
> And wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins,
> And rebuild it as in the days of old;

Acts 15 contains the account of God's demonstration that Gentiles were to come into the kingdom of Christ in the same manner as Jews. In Ac. 15.13-17, James said:

> And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Brethren, hearken unto me: Symeon hath rehearsed how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After these things I will return, And I will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen; And I will build again the ruins thereof, And I will set it up: That the residue of men may seek after the Lord, And all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, Saith the Lord, who maketh these things known from of old.

So James points out that it's proper for Gentiles to come into the church, in fulfillment of Amos 9.11-12, where Amos prophesied of the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David. Though James believed and explained that the tabernacle of David had to be rebuilt before Gentiles could come into the kingdom, premillennialists don't believe it, and thus Gentiles have no right to hear the gospel and obey it. Take careful note of what C. I. Scofield says in his *Scofield Reference Bible*. In fact, the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David is so crucial that Scofield said of this passage:

> Dispensationally, this is the most important passage in the N.T. James quotes from Amos 9.11, 12. The verses which follow in Amos describe the final regathering of

> Israel, which the other prophets invariably connect with the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. (Dr. C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1917, p. 1169.)

Scofield thought Amos 9.11-12 was not yet fulfilled, and claimed that it was the most important passage in the Bible to his theory. The problem with his position is that James quoted Amos 9.11-12 to prove that Gentiles then had the right to hear the gospel, and that the tabernacle of David was rebuilt so that the Gentiles could seek after the Lord! If the premillennialists are right about their "most important passage in the N.T.", then James was wrong and Gentiles cannot now seek after the Lord! Is not this a practical difficulty with the theory of premillennialism? Does the theory of premillennialism make any difference? Those of us who are Gentiles (such as Mr. Scofield, Walvoord, Ryrie, and nearly all premillennialists) should realize that it does make a difference! If premillennialism is right, none of us have the authority to obey the gospel of Christ, much less to preach it! Premillennialism falls on its own "most important passage in the New Testament!

So, who are you going to believe on the topic of the Tabernacle of David? James, who thought that it was fulfilled, or Scofield and his followers, who don't believe it's been fulfilled yet? Obviously, you can't believe both!

One last portrayal of this temple is given by Paul in I Tim. 3.14-15 to the young preacher Timothy:

> 14 These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly; 15 but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the *house of God, which is the church of the living God*, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Thus, it is clear that the New Testament understanding of the messianic house of God was the body of Christ, his church. Those people constitute the temple of God.

Philadelphian overcomers, holding fast their faith, would never lose their fellowship with Christ, thus would go out of Jesus' temple no more. When Jesus says that he would write on them the name of God: that would show God's ownership of them, God's approval of them, and their destiny to be with God. To have the name of the city of God would show their citizenship in Jerusalem, not Old Covenant Jerusa-

lem which was headed for imminent destruction, but the New Jerusalem which we'll see in chapters 21-22. They will also have Christ's own new name.

We're going to see in chapters 7 and 13 that everyone has a name written on them. Everyone reading this volume has a name written on them, either God's name, showing his ownership, approval, and destiny, or Satan's, showing his ownership, approval, and destination: the lake of fire (Rev. 20.10). In Revelation, the overcomers in Christ will share in his victory, while those who aren't overcomers will share in Satan's defeat.

I have Bibles with my name embossed on them. My name indicates ownership, approval, and destination. Those are Bibles that I own, approve of, and they are destined to stay with me. I don't write my name on paper clips and rubber bands. They're of no great value. God and Christ put their names on those who are of great value to them. Paul has this concept in mind in II Tim. 2.19, when he says:

> Howbeit the firm foundation of God standeth, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his: and, Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness.

Jesus concludes this letter to one church by instructing the reader to hear what the Spirit is saying to all the churches.

3:13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

Laodicea vv14-22

Concerning the city of Laodicea, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* says:

> Though Laodicea stood on the great highway at the junction of several important routes, it was a place of little consequence until the Roman province of Asia was formed in 190 BC. It then suddenly became a great and wealthy center of industry, famous specially for the fine black wool of its sheep and for the Phrygian powder for the eyes, which was manufactured there. In the vicinity was the temple of Men Karou and a renowned school of medicine. In the year 60 AD, the city

> was almost entirely destroyed by an earthquake, but so wealthy were its citizens that they rejected the proffered aid of Rome, and quickly rebuilt it at their own expense. (*ISBE*, "Laodicea")

Some of these facts will be helpful to our understanding a number of Jesus' statements in his letter to the church there.

3:14 And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God:

The word translated "Amen" here is also translated "verily, verily," "indeed, indeed," "let it be," and "that's the way it is." Jesus uses that as his self-designation to the Laodiceans, as he's claiming to speak things as they really are. In II Cor. 1.18-20, Paul speaks of this characteristic of Christ in quite a bit more detail:

> 18 But as God is faithful, our word toward you is not yea and nay. 19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timothy, was not yea and nay, but in him is yea. 20 For how many soever be the promises of God, in him is the yea: wherefore also through him is the Amen, unto the glory of God through us.

As we've seen in many of these letters, Jesus' self-designation is usually related to what he's going to tell that church to do. Here, he's claiming to say things as they really are, and he's surely going to do that with the Laodiceans, as we'll see. He's going to tell them many things that they're not going to believe, but he's going to make it stick.

When Jesus claims again to be the faithful and true witness, he again uses the word *marturo*, or martyr, that he used in 1.2, a witness who stands by his testimony to the point of death. This is exactly what Jesus did. He testified of himself, of his father, and he died for it. When his accusers asked him if he was the Christ, his answer was, "You said it." That's the Amen he's claiming to be here.

The statement Jesus makes of his "the beginning of the creation of God," is controversial. Our Jehovah's Witnesses friends use this statement as a proof text for their contention that Jesus was the first created being, and as such, shouldn't be worshiped because the worship of something created is idolatry. The word "beginning" here is from *arche*, which means first in either time or rank. A little reflection on

several statements about Jesus will convince us that Jesus was not the first created being. In Jn. 1.3, John says:

> All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made.

If all things were made through him, he couldn't have been made or created himself. Likewise, in Rev. 5.13, we'll see:

> And every created thing which is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things are in them, heard I saying, Unto him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever.

Again, if every created thing in every realm spoke to Jesus, he couldn't have been created himself. Thus, he's not the first in order to be created, but the first in rank with respect to the creation. He has the preeminence over the whole creation. He created it all, is over it all, and it is for him (Col. 1.16).

3:15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

Of course, Jesus knows their works better than they themselves do. He knows both what they're doing and exactly why they're doing it. In this letter, he doesn't commend anything in Laodicea, either the church or even a few of its members, as he did in Sardis. Evidently, he couldn't commend their faith, love, or patience, as he had other churches.

Jesus then says that Laodicea was neither cold nor hot. The word translated "hot" is *zestos*, which gives a strong hint to its meaning: they had no zest, zeal, nor energy. They were apathetic or indifferent. Jesus would prefer they were energetic and not indifferent.

3:16 So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth.

We might like water at 108 degrees Fahrenheit in our hot tubs, but that's not nearly hot enough for coffee; it would seem lukewarm, not enough zest. Jesus then says that since he couldn't abide their indifference, he would spew or vomit them out of his mouth, like lukewarm beverages might make us want to throw up—they make us sick to our stomach, which is what Jesus says here.

After Jesus' explicit feelings about lukewarm-ness, it certainly behooves us to ask how much zest or vigor we have in our service of Christ, particularly in the activity of a local church. Do we develop our qualifications for various duties, then pursue those duties energetically, or do we do enough just not to get in trouble? In your case, you know the answer, and as Jesus says, he knows even better than you do. The same thing is true of me.

3:17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked:

They *were* physically rich, so wealthy that after their great quake in AD 60-61 when offered financial help, they rejected it, saying they were able to care for themselves. They were proud of the fact that they needed nothing. However, in the spiritual realm, Jesus, who knew their true spiritual condition better than they did, said they were wretched and miserable and poor, with no reason to be proud. They were proud of their medical school with its specialty in caring for eyes, but spiritually, they were blind. They proudly wore their expensive black wool clothing, not realizing that spiritually, they were naked. Spiritually, they didn't have a stitch on!

To this very kind of people, Paul had given Timothy this charge in I Tim. 6.17-19:

> 17 Charge them that are rich in this present world, that they be not highminded, nor have their hope set on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; 18 that they do good, that they be rich in good works, that they be ready to distribute, willing to communicate; 19 laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on the life which is life indeed.

Jesus and Paul both attempted to teach the physically rich to change their emphasis to spiritual riches, to be rich in good works.

Many people in the Bible have mistakenly had the idea that physical riches and blessings indicates the strength of one's relationship to God. Job's three friends thought Job's sudden poverty meant he was a great sinner, so they mistakenly urged him to repent. In Jn. 9.2, Jesus' disciples, evidently thinking the same thing, asked him of a man born blind:

> And his disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?

The account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 is given to show the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, that just because a man was rich, didn't mean "his ticket was punched" with God.

3:18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich; and white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest; and eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see.

Jesus' advice to this church was to purchase gold of true value from him if they wanted to be spiritually rich, and white garments indicating their purity and righteous acts (19.8) if they didn't want to be spiritually naked, and to use his teaching to enable them to really see their condition, not the eye salve for which Laodicea was famous.

In Mt. 13.13-16, Jesus revealed why he taught in parables:

> 13 Therefore speak I to them in parables; because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. 14 And unto them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall in no wise understand; And seeing ye shall see, and shall in no wise perceive: 15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, And their ears are dull of hearing, And their eyes they have closed; Lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And should turn again, And I should heal them. 16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear.

In Revelation, Jesus has the same concern about the eyesight of the Laodiceans, not with their physical eyes, but their spiritual ones.

Jesus now reveals why he was taking such a hard line with this church.

3:19 As many as I love, I reprove and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

He reproved them so because he loved them so, because it's those he loves that he rebukes and admonishes sharply. If he hadn't cared so much for them, he would have said nothing. Then he urges them to be

vigorous, energetic, and zealous spiritually and change their viewpoint and mindset. This is exactly what we tell our young children when we punish them for some infraction, isn't it? After the punishment has sunk in, we gather them into our arms and assure them that "it hurts us more than it hurts you," and that we punish them because we love them, and we give them assurances of that love.

3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

This is a verse we hear misapplied thousands of times as it's applied as an invitation for non-Christians to become such by obeying the gospel. Jesus wasn't inviting non-Christians to become Christians. He was inviting Christians at Laodicea to become more fervent and reject their indifference and apathy.

He wants them to hear his voice and let his teaching permeate their hearts and lives, so that he might be in fellowship with them fully. Note: the decision is ours. He doesn't open the door and barge in, forcing us to do his will, but we must open the door and voluntarily accept his will. In Ps. 110.3, the most quoted passage in the New Testament, and entirely messianic, God tells the Christ:

> Thy people offer themselves willingly in the day of thy power...

If we're going to be the messiah's people, it must be voluntary on our part.

3:21 He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne.

The overcomers in Laodicea are those who reject their previous indifference in the service of Christ so that while he's reigning at the right hand of his father, they may sit at Christ's right hand and reign with him. He also wants them to do it the same way he had, by overcoming himself. Again, when we get to 12.11, we'll see how both he and the Laodiceans overcame:

> And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even unto death.

3:22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

Again, Jesus closes his letter to one church by calling the attention of all the churches to what he's told Laodicea.

Summary of the Letters to the Seven Churches

Arthur Ogden, in *The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets*, wisely suggests in his summary to the letters to the seven churches, that we accumulate all the commendations Jesus makes in these letters, all the condemnation he makes, and finally the promises made to the overcomers. We know Jesus would commend, condemn, and reward the overcomers the same way he did the seven churches of Asia. Ogden has done that for us on pp. 162-165. We produce his lists here:

Jesus commended their love, faith, works, life, purity, strength, and patience. He would commend ours as well.

Jesus condemned their indifference, worldliness, immorality, ignorance, incomplete works, error, and tolerance of error. He would condemn ours as well.

Jesus promised to reward overcomers with the tree of life, the hidden manna, protection from second death, the morning star, white raiment, our names in the book of life, power over the nations, confessing us before our father and the angels, making us pillars in his temple, putting on us the name of New Jerusalem, not making us go out any more, putting God's name on us, letting us reign with him, giving us a new name, giving us a white stone, and giving us ultimate victory. He promises us the same as well.

Chapter 4

The Throne Scene

We're now ready for the main body of Revelation. After introducing Christ in chapter 1 and covering his letters to the seven churches of Asia, which will be in different states of preparation for the events about to be revealed, we now come to the main revelation of things which were to occur imminently.

I suspect that the original recipients of this book thought chapters 2-3, the letters to the seven churches, were much more difficult for them to understand than the rest of Revelation, whereas most of us think just the opposite. Because of their Old Testament background, they probably could much more easily understand the rest of the book, and.because most of us don't imitate first century Christians in that respect, we take a contrary view. I say this to encourage the modern reader to expect to understand the rest of these chapters.

In 1.19, we were given a very brief outline of Revelation, as John was told to write 1) the things he had seen: Jesus, whom he described in chapter 1, 2) the things which are: the state of the seven churches in chapters 2-3, and 3) the things which would shortly occur: chapters 4-22. Thus, we have covered two thirds of that outline, and are ready for the rest of Revelation. In chapters 4-5, John is going to be taken to heaven in a vision, to give him an overview of what's going on. He's going to be shown that, regardless of what it looks like on earth, with Jews persecuting Christians and things looking out of control, God is on his throne and he is in charge. It's not Rome or Jerusalem that are ruling the world, but Jesus Christ and the father are in control of what's happening to them.

4:1 After these things I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice that I heard, a voice as of a trumpet speaking

with me, one saying, Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must come to pass hereafter.

After "these things" (the letters to the seven churches that Jesus dictated), John saw a door opened in heaven, even though he was still on the Isle of Patmos on the earth. He also heard a great voice as of the voice of a trumpet. We've seen that a trumpet was an instrument of war, for warning or announcing various military actions. It would be like an attention-getting siren. John is then told to come up to heaven in this vision, and to be shown things which must occur in the future. From 1.1, 3 ("which must shortly come to pass", "the time is at hand"), we take these to be things which would occur in the near future.

4:2 Straightway I was in the Spirit: and behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and one sitting upon the throne;

John's saying he was immediately in the Spirit means that he was under the control of the Spirit, as he had said in 1.10. In a similar vision in Ezek. 8.3, Ezekiel was taken "in the spirit" to Jerusalem while physically he was in Babylon. Here, John will be taken in the spirit to heaven, though physically, he was still on the isle of Patmos. The Spirit controlled what John saw in this vision. John saw one sitting upon the throne in heaven. Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1 and Daniel 7 each had similar inaugural visions at the beginning of their works, with God sitting on his throne. The impression given was that regardless of how things looked to his people in the times of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, God was in his heaven, sitting on his throne, exercising calm and steady control, Next, John describes God's appearance.

4:3 and he that sat was to look upon like a jasper stone and a sardius: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, like an emerald to look upon.

It's customary to analyze the appearance of jasper and sardius gemstones, and point out that the rainbow has been a sign of God's faithfulness since the flood of Noah's day. Ezekiel's inaugural vision also had precious stones and a rainbow, and John says that this one was like an emerald. We're not dealing with some televangelist in a mobile office with cheap carpet! The root meaning of emerald is "glowing," Rather than examine these stones and the rainbow to such detail, we merely ask, "What is the impression that this vision makes on you? Isn't it one of beauty? God isn't a precious stone nor is he a rainbow, but the picture John relates is one of God's astonishing beauty.

4:4 And round about the throne were four and twenty thrones: and upon the thrones I saw four and twenty elders sitting, arrayed in white garments; and on their heads crowns of gold.

Surrounding God's throne are 24 other thrones, with 24 distinguished old (Gr. *presbuteros*, elders) men dressed in white, the color of purity and righteousness acts, and with gold victory crowns (Gr. *stephanos*). Scholars are divided as to the identity of these 24. This is not a meeting of Boy Scouts, is it? It's so much more impressive than that. Most think 12 of them represented the patriarchs of the Old Testament, and the 12 apostles in the New, as we'll see both Old and New Covenant saints in the book. In Mt. 19.28, Jesus said of his apostles:

> Verily I say unto you, that ye who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

As we're about to see the judgment of Israel and its renewal in the coming chapters, this seems to fit the context well. Others suggest from I Chronicles 29 that they represent the 24 courses of priests under the Mosaic law. I suggest we keep this question in mind as we continue to follow these 24 through the book, as we'll see them in the story throughout. The fact that these elders are wearing crowns of victory makes us think that they have been victorious or overcomers of every obstacle they've encountered in their service to God, They represent God's people that had already paid the price, they've passed the test, and were victorious. Christians who were still in the tribulation on earth were being watched and cheered on by these dignified, powerful beings. As the author of Hebrews said in 12.1-2:

> 1 Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

4:5 And out of the throne proceed lightnings and voices and thunders. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;

Lightnings, voices, and thunders represent great energy and power, the power to execute God's will, which will result in terrible and awful events. There's a storm brewing in our story! Many will be reminded of Israel at Mt. Sinai in Ex. 20.18f:

> 18 And all the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. 19 Then they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die."

Since the Jews were scared literally to death at Sinai, we can easily imagine that John stood in awe at the throne he was seeing.

Psalm 97.1-6 will help us interpret this scene:

> 1 The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice;
> Let the many islands be glad.
> 2 Clouds and thick darkness surround Him;
> Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.
> 3 Fire goes before Him, And burns up His adversaries round about.
> 4 His lightnings lit up the world;
> The earth saw and trembled.
> 5 The mountains melted like wax at the presence of the LORD,
> At the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.
> 6 The heavens declare His righteousness,
> And all the peoples have seen His glory.

The psalmist speaks like John in characterizing the lightnings and thunders as associated with God's throne set for punitive judgment, which is exactly the context of Revelation.

He also saw seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits: either seven special agents of God, or the Holy Spirit in his completeness. We'll see these seven spirits again in the next chapter.

4:6 and before the throne, as it were a sea of glass like a crystal; and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, four living creatures full of eyes before and behind.

If you come upon a lake and it's calm and as clear as a mirror, what's your impression? It's not a scene of turmoil, there are no waves, no surf, nor whitecaps. It's serene, and everything is under control. That's what we see at God's throne. No matter the trials and tribulations the saints on earth are suffering, with things apparently spinning out of control, around God's throne there's no chaos, no arguing, no turmoil, nothing out of place, no one misbehaving, only grandeur. Though Christians in tribulation on the earth may be upset and anxious, God's not shaken!

We've already mentioned that Ezekiel 1 contains an inaugural vision like John is seeing, with Ezekiel saying in v28 that he saw "the glory of God." In chapters 8-9, Ezekiel sees this glory of God leave the temple, then the city of Jerusalem, and then Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. In Revelation, we're seeing a scene like Ezekiel saw when God was about to destroy Jerusalem again, as we'll see.

John then sees four living creatures in the midst of God's throne. The KJV says "beasts," yet the term (Gr. *zoa*, from which we get our word zoology) just means living creatures, living beings, representatives of God, special agents he uses to execute his will. Since these creatures are full of eyes in front and rear, there's no sneaking up on them to obstruct their activity, and they are all-seeing: there's nothing beyond their examination. John further describes these four creatures in the next verse.

4:7 And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face as of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.

In Ezekiel's inaugural vision, creatures like this were called cherubim. In Isaiah's, they were called seraphim. Both of them were high-ranking agents of the throne of God. Cherubim were placed at the gates of Eden to keep Adam and Eve out after they were ejected. They are special agents to do special jobs for God. These creatures are like the lion, the king of beasts that is esteemed for its power and strength, its ability to tear a victim to shreds. A calf is the opposite of a lion, known for its gentleness. The face of a man brings to mind in this context the intelligence of man, and a flying eagle brings the image of the swiftness of a bird of prey, or a vulture. All these abilities are useful to God in executing his will, particularly in judgments.

4:8 And the four living creatures, having each one of them six wings, are full of eyes round about and within: and they have no

rest day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.

Since these creatures have six wings, they are able to go anywhere swiftly. They are all-seeing, omniscient, they never rest, they're always on duty, and never unprepared. They're never too weary to be of service to God. They constantly cry: "Almighty God is special, special, special, unique, like nothing else, and he was, is, and is to come," He's the unique, all-seeing, all-powerful eternal one.

4:9 And when the living creatures shall give glory and honor and thanks to him that sitteth on the throne, to him that liveth for ever and ever,

4:10 the four and twenty elders shall fall down before him that sitteth on the throne, and shall worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and shall cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

As the four living creatures are worshipping God, all 24 elders fall in obeisance and subservience as well, symbolized by casting their crowns before God, demonstrating that God is worthy of worship, even though they're more powerful than anything we've ever seen on earth. As they worship God, they say:

4:11 Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power: for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they were, and were created.

Thus, God is worthy of worship because he's not a created thing. If he were, it would be idolatry to worship him. John is going to receive emphatic teaching that it's improper to worship angels, for they are created beings, impressive though they are. To Christians living in the Roman Empire in the 60s AD, where deifying the Caesars was beginning to be prevalent, this would, of course, be a real problem for Christ's saints, and it may be that they needed to be reminded that the Caesars weren't worthy to be worshipped, for they were created beings themselves, and couldn't create anything! The only reason this creation is here is because God willed it, created it, and now sustains it. Worldly rulers have never done any such thing.

Chapter 5

Christ Opens the Sealed Book

The vision of the throne scene of chapter 4 continues, with our attention now focused on a scroll, not a modern cut-page book or codex. This vision describes heaven's view of the tribulation the saints on earth are suffering. Regardless of what it looks like to them, the throne of God is where the action really is, not Rome, nor Jerusalem. Everything in the whole creation is overseen and controlled from here.

5:1 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the back, close sealed with seven seals.

Picture a long roll of paper, say 100 feet long and 1 foot high, rolled into a scroll on a couple of sticks of wood. After it's written, it's sealed every few feet to keep it from unrolling accidentally. When reading this scroll, one would unfasten the first seal, reading the first few feet until reaching the next seal, where the process would be repeated. This scroll was written by God, sealed by God, and is held in God's right hand, only to be taken and opened by one qualified to read it, revealing what's about to happen, and guaranteeing its fulfillment.

5:2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a great voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?

Who this strong angel is, we're not told, but he shouts a challenge for anyone who is qualified to open the scroll and loosen the seals.

5:3 And no one in the heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look thereon.

Of all the millions on earth or in heaven, no one in heaven (the spiritual realm), or on the earth (the physical realm), or under the earth (probably hades, the unseen realm) was qualified to take the book. Who does that leave? John could think of no one.

5:4 And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look thereon:

John, in the middle of tribulation that other saints were undergoing, was so looking forward to learn what was revealed in the scroll that he bawled like a baby because he wasn't going to learn what was going to happen, and it broke his heart.

5:5 and one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book and the seven seals thereof.

So one of these 24 distinguished old men in attendance at the throne told him to stop crying because someone was qualified to open the scroll and reveal its contents. This person was the Lion from the tribe of Judah. This is a reference to a messianic prophecy of Christ in Gen. 49.8-10. It was spoken by Jacob before his death, when all his sons, the patriarchs of Israel, were brought before him for his blessing. To Judah, Jacob said:

> 8 Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
> Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
> Your father's sons shall bow down to you.
> 9 Judah is a lion's whelp;
> From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
> He couches, he lies down as a lion,
> And as a lion, who dares rouse him up?
> 10 *The scepter shall not depart from Judah,*
> *Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,*
> *Until Shiloh comes,*
> And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

Verse 1 gives the time element of this prophecy: "at the end of the days," i.e., Old Covenant Israel's last days, when Christ lived. Shiloh was understood by the Jews to be the messiah who would come and save Israel. This lion was also to be the root of David, that is, the one who would produce David, Israel's second king. In II Sam. 7.12-13, the prophet Nathan tells David that one of his descendents would be king after him, and sit on David's throne forever:

> 12 When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for My

> name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

David was of the tribe of Judah. The messiah would be both David's ancestor, as well as his descendent. Nothing is more affirmed in the New Testament than the fact that Jesus fulfilled everything prophesied about him as David's promised descendent. In Rev. 22.16, Jesus is identified as the root and offspring of David:

> I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star.

Isaiah also foretold of the messiah fulfilling the promise made to David in Isa. 11.1-10. Verse 10 is quoted by Paul in Rom. 15.12 as fulfilled in his mission to the Gentiles. In the first gospel sermon in Acts 2.29-31, Peter accuses the Jews of his day of killing the messiah, then refers to a prophecy by David of the messiah being resurrected to sit on his throne, and then says:

> 29 Brethren, I may say unto you freely of the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us unto this day. 30 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins he would set one upon his throne; 31 he foreseeing this spake of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he left unto Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

So John is told that the messiah has overcome and he's qualified to open the scroll and reveal and guarantee the fulfillment of its contents. This is the same word—overcoming (being victorious) that we saw in chapters 2-3. We've already seen that saints overcame the same way Jesus did in 12.11, which is how Jesus overcame to open the book and its seven seals. Likewise, this is the same way we overcome.

Thus, John turns to see the one worthy to open the scroll, perhaps expecting to see a lion, and instead, he sees a lamb.

5:6 And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth.

The lamb John saw was symbolized as a grotesque thing with seven horns and seven eyes. The horns of a bull or goat represent its power. An animal with seven horns would have complete power. With seven eyes, he would also be all-seeing, nothing could be hidden from him, and he wouldn't miss anything, as Christ didn't miss anything about any of the seven churches of chapters 2-3.

Jesus was introduced by John the Baptist (Jn. 1.29) as "the lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." That Jesus has complete power is seen in his statement to his disciples before his ascension into heaven when he said, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." He also has the seven Spirits of God, either the Holy Spirit in his completeness, or seven ministering spirits Christ uses to execute work for him, as we saw in 1.4. These spirits of God may be this same type of ministering spirit or angel, sent forth into all the land (*ge*).

5:7 And he came, and he taketh it out of the right hand of him that sat on the throne.

So Christ accepts the challenge, takes the scroll, and will reveal and execute what it reveals.

5:8 And when he had taken the book, the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Once Christ took the scroll, heaven erupted with praise to him. Each of the 24 eminent elders and the four living creatures, so much more impressive than normal angels, fell down prostrate before him, giving him the worship they had given the father in chapter 4. Each one had a harp, an instrument of joy, which we learn from Ps. 137.1-2. Written about the Jewish captivity in Babylon, it explains that since they were in captivity, there wasn't going to be any joy: hence they wouldn't need their harps:

> 1 By the rivers of Babylon,
> There we sat down and wept,
> When we remembered Zion.
> 2 Upon the willows in the midst of it
> We hung our harps.

Yet these 24 elders had harps, instruments of joy, in heaven! Why? Was it proper for them to be joyfully celebrating while saints were be-

ing persecuted in tribulation? Partying while others were suffering? Momentarily, we'll see that it was proper because those in heaven knew something the saints on earth didn't know, but are about to find out. When they do, they'll be using their harps too!

These elders also had censers with sweet incense which were the prayers of the saints. This reveals the attitude of heaven toward the prayers of suffering saints, as they're praying for protection, deliverance, and vengeance. They're viewed as sweet, as these elders hold them in the presence of God and Christ. In 6.10, we'll see such a prayer that martyred saints prayed, the answer to which will encompass the rest of Revelation.

5:9 And they sing a new song, saying, Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou was slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation,

The song is new (Gr., new in quality, not new in time, a song that couldn't have been sung before) because now it praises the sacrifice that Christ made. He's worthy to open the scroll because he had been slain, and with the price of his blood, he had redeemed those who were suffering then, and all men who were faithful throughout history. No one else could have been worthy to have this song sung about them because they hadn't paid such a price.

5:10 and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon earth (Gr. *ge*, land).

We saw in 1.6 and 2.26 that from the beginning of Old Covenant Israel, God's people were a kingdom, depicting God's royal government over them, and priests, men who were qualified to offer sacrifices acceptably to God. We've also seen that Christians in the first century were a kingdom of priests. This reigning of the saints has been going on since Christ began reigning. We're sitting and reigning with Christ now. Imagine how that would sound to saints who were then suffering tribulation, including John, who was in that same tribulation. If they thought that Christ didn't understand that they were suffering at the hands of their enemies and hence they couldn't be reigning, they needed to appreciate that Christ reigned in the midst of his enemies, and they were, too! Some don't see how Christ is reigning now, either, yet Paul said in I Cor. 15.25:

> For he must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet.

It was prophesied in Ps. 110.1-2, a messianic psalm and the most quoted Old Testament passage in the New Testament, that the messiah would rule in the midst of his enemies. In this psalm, "The Lord" was God the father, and David's Lord was the messiah:

> 1 The LORD says to my Lord: Sit at My right hand,
> Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.
> 2 The LORD will stretch forth Thy strong scepter
> from Zion, saying, Rule in the midst of Thine enemies.

5:11 And I saw, and I heard a voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;

John then heard a choir like none of us have ever heard, not only including the four living creatures and the 24 elders, but hundreds of millions of angels, with millions more joining in, yet singing with one voice. How great a voice would that be!

5:12 saying with a great voice, Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might and honor, and glory, and blessing.

These hundreds of millions praise (1) Christ's power, his authority to do the job, (2) his riches, that give him that power, (3) his wisdom, his ability to use his power and riches to solve problems, and (4) his might, the ability to use his power. A new teenage drive behind the wheel of his dad's car has access to a lot of power, but perhaps little ability to use that power. There is much power that we don't know how to use, much of the power within the atom, for example. Someday we will have the ability and the might to harness the power within atoms, the power that fuels the sun, to give us unlimited power, but as yet we don't have that ability. Christ has both the power and the might to use it. They also praise (5) his honor, the respect he receives from others, (6) his glory, the blessings of receiving all honor, and (7) the blessing of receiving such worship and praise. He was worthy to receive this worship because he was slain.

5:13 And every created thing which is in the heaven, and on the earth (Gr. *ge* land)**, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things are in them, heard I saying, Unto him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever.**

Now the whole creation in heaven and on earth praises God on the throne, and the Lamb, ascribing to him blessing, honor, glory, and dominion. The only reason that the Ceasars rule at all is because Christ has the dominion, and is ruling them as kings of the earth, and his rule will never end.

Many times, people have the mistaken impression that at the end of time, Christ will turn back his authority to reign to the father. In I Cor. 15.24-26, Paul said:

> 24 Then cometh *the end*, when he shall *deliver up* the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For he must reign, *till* he hath put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy that shall be abolished is death.

The End of What? The End of Time?

What "end" did Paul address? Many think he spoke of the end of time, yet the entire Bible does not contain the phrase "the end of time." The closest passage might be Dan. 12.4, which the NASV mistakenly translates as "the end of time." The ASV translates it as "the time of the end," as do the KJV, NIV, and the NKJV, among others. The expressions "time of the end" and "the end of time" reflect two vastly different concepts. One supposes the end of time itself (on which the popular view of the resurrection is based), and the other speaks of the time of "the end," the end of the age. In Daniel's context, the age ends with the destruction of Jerusalem and her temple. As we've seen all along, Jesus plainly said the time of the end of the age was in his generation (Mt. 24.3, 6, 13, 14, 34).

Our understanding of Paul's teaching concerning the end hinges on our ability to distinguish the difference between these two phrases. Indeed, using these two expressions interchangeably has led many Christians to draw erroneous conclusions. Certainly, much confusion abounds about the precise meanings of these two word combinations. So we want to devote a little space to answering the question: "The end of what?"

The End of the Christian Age?

Though we many times think "the end" Paul spoke of refers to the end of the Christian age; in reality, *the Christian age has no end.* For

example, in Isa. 9.6-7, Isaiah prophesied the endlessness of the Messiah's rule:

> For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be *no end to the increase of His government* or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

Likewise, in Lk. 1.31-33, Gabriel told Mary of the endlessness of the Messiah's reign:

> And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and *he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.*

In Eph. 3.21, Paul referred to Christ's reign as the "age without end."

Thus, the term "end of the age" in Jesus' teaching never referred to the end of the Christian age, which has no end. Instead, it foretold the end of the Mosaic age. Similarly, the term "last days" never refers to the last days of the Christian age; again, because the Christian age has no end, hence it has no last days. However, the last days of the Mosaic age certainly did exist.

When asked about the end of the age in Mt. 24.1-3, Jesus said it would occur in his generation (Mt. 24.34). He spoke of the end of the Mosaic age.

Continuing on in I Cor. 15.25, Paul says Christ must reign *till* he hath put all his enemies under his feet. It's popular to take "till" or "until" as implying a change, i.e., that Christ would not reign after the death of Adam was destroyed. However, in the sentence, "A will be true until B," the word "until" *never implies at all* that a change will or will not take place after B. When Matthew told us Joseph knew not Mary *until* she had brought forth a son," does *until* imply a change took place in their conjugal relations after Jesus was born? Not at all. A

change did take place, for we see other children coming into the family. While we don't learn that from "until," we understand it from other passages.

Similarly, when Christ is said to rule "until" he puts all his enemies under his feet, no change in his rule when all his enemies are subjected is implied. However, we learn from other passages, both in the Old Testament and the New, that Christ's reign has no end. A passage does not exist that suggests a surrender of Christ's sovereignty. As eschatology scholar William Bell said of this matter, at the coming of Christ, "he sits, not quits!"

This is exactly what Mt. 25.31 says:

> But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he *sit* on the throne of his glory:...

We should recall that this statement occurs in the Olivet Discourse, where in Mt. 24.30, Jesus said he would come in glory, and in verse 34, promised, "Verily [truly—SGD] I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished." Jesus said this was true. *Was it true and fulfilled in his generation or not?* I affirm that it was.

The popular view that "until" implies a change in result, an erroneous view from the outset, ignores all other passages that plainly teach Christ's rule was to be unending. Remember, in Lk. 1.33, Gabriel told Mary:

> ...and he [Jesus] shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Can you get the consent of your mind to assert that Christ's rule was to end at "the end?"

Contrarywise, the revelation that Jesus would "deliver up the kingdom" to his father at the end, leads some to believe that Jesus would no longer be ruling. Certainly, this belief contradicts the plain passages we've just seen of the endlessness of Christ's reign. Additionally, the term "deliver" doesn't mean to surrender or abdicate, any more than the same word meant in I Cor. 15.3, where Paul said he "delivered unto you" the gospel. He presented the gospel to the Corinthians.

Likewise, in Mt. 25.31, Jesus said:

> But when the Son of man shall *come in his glory,* and all the angels with him, then shall *he sit on the throne of his glory:*...

He didn't say he would get off the throne of his glory, did he? Again, in the context of the Olivet discourse, which Jesus said would be fulfilled in his generation (Mt. 24.34) and while some of his disciples were still alive (Mt. 16.27-28), he said he would be presenting a fully subdued kingdom before the Father, not quitting his reign and getting off the throne.

In Rev. 22.3, we see Jesus and the father sitting on the throne simultaneously:

> And there shall be no curse any more: *and the throne of God and of the Lamb* shall be therein: and his servants shall serve him;...

Obviously, if Jesus wasn't supposed to be on the throne after the end (of the Mosaic age), when death was destroyed, he didn't know it!

5:14 And the four living creatures said, Amen. And the elders fell down and worshipped.

The four living creatures saying Amen means, "that's the way it is, and you can bank on it!" Christ is the one who's in control. The elders falling down and worshiping Christ reminds us of I Pet. 3.22. He speaks of Jesus...

> ...who is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

This is exactly the picture we see of Christ in heaven in John's vision. This closes John's vision of the throne scene, and in the next chapter, the emphasis is going to be on Christ opening the seals of that scroll.

Chapter 6

The Opening of the First Six Seals

Now that Christ has been recognized as the one who can open the seals of the scroll, he begins the task of opening them. As he does so, the four living creatures around God's throne announce four horsemen on horses.

6:1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, Come.

The KJV and others say "Come and see," as though addressed to John. The word "see" is not in the text, just "come," evidently addressed to the person on the first horse.

6:2 And I saw, and behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon had a bow; and there was given unto him a crown: and he came forth conquering, and to conquer.

The first horse is a white one, and the rider has a bow and a crown (Gr. *stephanos*, victory crown), and is presented as a conqueror, but he's not identified. In chapter 19, we see Christ on a white horse, and he may be here, or it may be a conqueror who's acting as his agent, a Roman Caesar or general, for instance. Vespasian and Titus were used by Jesus to wage a 3-1/2 year war against the Jews in Palestine. Notice the next three horses are going to be acting as agents of Christ in his judgment on Jerusalem.

6:3 And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, Come.

6:4 And another horse came forth, a red horse: and to him that sat thereon it was given to take peace from the earth (Gr. *ge*, land),

and that they should slay one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

Red, the color of blood, may be symbolizing bloodshed, particularly since it's said that this horse represents peace being taken from the land. Notice particularly that *the people of the land* are going to slay one another. It's long been known that more citizens of Jerusalem were slain by roving gangs of Jewish zealots than were killed by Roman armies.

The rider of this horse was "given" a great sword, that is, it was supplied to him for this task. His coming isn't just a coincidence. He's doing what God wants him to do. He's coming to pour out God's wrath.

Recall that Jesus in Mt. 24.6 foretold of wars and rumors of wars before the worst tribulation around Jerusalem took place. There wasn't going to be just one big war, and the siege would last a grinding three and a half years.

Consider anew Jesus' words in Mt. 10.34-39 in light of what we're seeing in Revelation:

> 34 Think not that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. 35 For I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law: 36 and a man's foes shall be they of his own household. 37 He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And he that doth not take his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me. 39 He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

Not sending peace but a sword is an ellipsis; there are words left out that the author or speaker wants the reader to supply. For example:"Not only but also" with emphasis on the second phrase. (For a discussion of this figure of speech, please see Chapter 17, "Ellipsis: Speaking Where the Bible is Silent" in the author's *How to Study the Bible: A Practical Guide to Independent Bible Study*.) Thus, Jesus is claiming that he *not only* came to bring peace, but he *also* came to bring a sword, and he *mainly* came to bring a sword, at least in this context. He brought the gospel of peace, intended to bring peace between man and God, and between men themselves, but in this instance,

he's emphasizing the sword of punishment coming upon Jerusalem, the sword that was given to the rider of this horse

In verse 39, notice how the martyrs of Revelation who are losing their lives for Jesus' sake are finding true life. This is equivalent to Jesus' teaching in Revelation, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life," again, not telling them to be faithful until they die of old age, but being faithful even if it costs them their lives.

6:5 And when he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, Come. And I saw, and behold, a black horse; and he that sat thereon had a balance in his hand.

The rider of the black horse with the balance in his hand indicates dark days, sadness, bad times, and mourning (as it still is!) ahead for the land of Palestine. The balance, a scale of commerce, not justice, indicates shortages and scarcity of commodities because of the siege of Jerusalem. Josephus relates that the roving gangs of zealots in the city destroyed much of the food supply in their internal fighting.

6:6 And I heard as it were a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A measure of wheat for a shilling, and three measures of barley for a shilling; and the oil and the wine hurt thou not.

A measure (approximately one quart) for a shilling (lit., a denarius, about a day's wage) of wheat for a day's wage is an extremely high price for wheat. For a man with children to feed, he would have to opt for the barley. These exorbitant prices were due to the siege, and the presence of black markets in commodities.

The rider of this black horse was told not to hurt or injure the oil and wine. Josephus relates that the wheat and barley were scarce, but the oil and wine were not scarce since they came from Perea, an area of Palestine noted for its abundance of olives and grapes. Josephus relates that since the Romans weren't stationed there permanently, many Christians escaped to Perea. Strangely, the supply of oil and wine wasn't affected by the siege. (Josephus, Flavius *Wars* 5, 13, 6).

6:7 And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, Come.

6:8 And I saw, and behold, a pale horse: and he that sat upon him, his name was Death; and Hades followed with him. And there was given unto them authority over the fourth part of the earth (Gr. *ge*,

land) **to kill with sword, and with famine, and with death, and by the wild beasts of the earth.**

This pale, or sickly green (Gr. *chloros*, from which we get chloride, chlorophyll, etc.) horse represented the pallor of death in many forms, from famine, war, disease, and even wild beasts. As seen in Jer. 15.2, 24.1ff, 10, accounts of death by these four methods are rife in the prophets, in Jeremiah's case, by the Babylonians. Death personified, and Hades (Gr. "unseen"), were the riders associated with this horse. Note that "there was *given to them authority* over the fourth part of the land." Again, the troubles befalling Old Covenant Israel weren't just happenstance: they were ordained by God, and he's given this authority to these punishers.

Hades is used of anything unseen. Nations were said to go to Hades when they vanished. Bodies in graves were said to be in Hades since they were unseen. That's the very reason they're buried! The realm of the unseen naturally follows the realm of death. This horse and rider represents the great amount of death that's coming on Old Covenant Israel.

The fact that Death and Hades affected only a fraction of the land of Palestine arises from the fact the Romans came into the land from the north, conquering as they came. Their early conquests were only partial judgments compared to the final devastation of Jerusalem. We'll see this fraction increase as we proceed through Revelation.

6:9 And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

John now sees an altar in heaven, and underneath that altar he sees the souls or lives of martyred saints poured out because they wouldn't recant their testimony of faith in Christ. We're going to see what happened to them after they were martyred. These are people of God that have already overcome by holding to their testimony at the cost of their lives. Since one's life is in his blood (Lev. 17.11), John sees the result of their lives poured out, as if they'd been sacrificial animals offered to God. John now hears prayers from these martyred saints in what may be the most important verse of the book, as the rest of the book is God's response to their prayers. These martyrs had been slain "for the word of God," like John was on Patmos "for the word of God" (1.9), at least because of his teaching it and their holding to it.

6:10 and they cried with a great voice, saying, How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**?**

The introductory chapter to this book deals with the concept of martyr vindication, and here is one of the most important illustrations of that concept in the Bible. Like Abel's blood crying out to God for vengeance in Gen. 4.9, these martyred saints are crying out for vengeance. They died for their faith in God, and they're perhaps indignant that God hasn't already avenged their blood, so they're asking how long it's going to take for his vengeance to take place. Notice that they're wanting God's vengeance to be exercised on the people that dwell in the land of Palestine. They were martyred by Jewish persecutors. In chapter 7, we'll see that these are Jewish saints, so they include Old Testament saints that were martyred for their faith as well as Christians who have suffered the same fate. These are among the martyrs Jesus mentioned in Mt. 23.35-36, when he assured the Jews they would be avenged in his generation.

6:11 And there was given them to each one a white robe; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little time, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, who should be killed even as they were, should have fulfilled their course.

In response to their prayers, these overcomers were given a white robe (3.5), evidence of their purity and righteous acts, and told to rest for a little time because there were some more saints and brethren to be killed as they had been, and they're going to have to fulfill their course, or God-prescribed path. Some of these future martyrs will be at the hands of the Romans, but most will be at Jewish hands.

In Heb. 10.32-37, God addresses Jewish Christians who are being persecuted by fellow Jews and are tempted to throw in the towel. These are warned by the author of Hebrews not to abandon their previous faithfulness:

> 32 But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were enlightened, ye endured a great conflict of sufferings; 33 partly, being made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, becoming partakers with them that were so used. 34 For ye both had compassion on them that were in bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your possessions, knowing that ye have for yourselves a better possession and

> an abiding one. 35 Cast not away therefore your boldness, which hath great recompense of reward. 36 For ye have need of patience, that, having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise. 37 *For yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry.*

Hebrews, probably written shortly after Revelation, warns Jewish Christians to remain faithful, "for yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry." This very little while here is from *hosan hosan micron*, a very very little while. The cup of Christ's vengeance on their Jewish persecutors is very nearly full, when he will come in vengeance on their Jewish persecutors

6:12 And I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood;

Here's the first answer to the martyr's plea, and though most believers apply them to the end of time (again, an expression that never occurs in the Bible), every phrase in it is used in the Old Testament for national judgment. Jesus had warned of earthquakes in Palestine in Mt. 24.7, leading up to Jerusalem's destruction. In Mt. 24.29, Jesus had warned of "the sun being turned to darkness and the moon to blood" foreshadowing the destruction of Jerusalem in his own generation" (v34). The only way the Jews had ever heard this language used was of national judgments on deserving peoples. A dark sun portended a dark day, like "Black Tuesday" that set off the great depression in 1929. That day wasn't dark because of a malfunction of the sun, but because of catastrophic financial woes that struck that day. The blood-red moon wasn't due to anything more than the smoke of the burning ruins of Jerusalem making the moon appear blood red. For further discussion of this type language, please see the author's discussion of "The Olivet Discourse," in Appendix 2.

Many times people ask if the end times aren't near in our own time because it seems like there are so many earthquakes in the news these days. First, it may have been that "earthquakes" here just implied upheaval, turmoil, and destruction, not actual geologic earthquakes. If literal earthquakes are meant, we have no more earthquakes now than in Jesus' time. Michael Crichton, writer and filmmaker, addressed the issue of whether we are experiencing more earthquakes:

> Is this really the end of the world? Earthquakes, hurricanes, floods?
>
> No, we simply live on an active planet. Earthquakes are continuous, a million and a half of them every year, or three every minute. A Richter 5 quake every six hours, a major quake every 3 weeks. A quake as destructive as the one in Pakistan every 8 months. It's nothing new, it's right on schedule.
>
> At any moment there are 1,500 electrical storms on the planet. A tornado touches down every six hours. We have ninety hurricanes a year, or one every four days. Again, right on schedule. Violent, disruptive, chaotic activity is a constant feature of our globe.
>
> Is this the end of the world? No: this is the world. (Michael Crichton, "Earthquakes: Fear and Complexity" [San Francisco, CA: The Independent Institute, November 15, 2005].)

It's time we knew it. Perhaps this realization will help us not sensationalize the great number of earthquakes occurring at all times on our planet.

6:13 and the stars of the heaven fell unto the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**, as a fig tree casteth her unripe figs when she is shaken of a great wind.**

Many times when we read this verse, someone says, "Surely the world has never seen anything like this," to which we should answer, "Certainly we have!"

Let's consider just one star falling from heaven to earth. Our sun (which is a rather mediocre star), will hold the equivalent of 1.3 million earths. There are other stars which dwarf our own sun. Now, just imagine one such star falling to earth—the entire planet would be completely destroyed. There would be nothing left for other stars to fall from heaven and hit. This language was never intended to be taken literally.

In many cases in the Bible, speakers of inspiration have used these same phrases to describe a physical judgment God would bring against a city or nation. Here it's used of stars falling to the land, the land of Palestine!

For example, in Isa. 13.10, God said of Babylon:

> For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in its going forth, and the moon shall not cause its light to shine.

Has this prophecy of punishment been fulfilled against Babylon? It has, for that nation no longer even exists. This example illustrates God's use of "judgment language" to describe Babylon's dark day. In the same chapter, in verse 13, God said:

> Therefore I will make the heavens to tremble, and the earth shall be shaken out of its place, in the wrath of Jehovah of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.

In verses 19-20, He said:

> And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch his tent there; neither shall shepherds make their flocks to lie down there.

In Babylon's case, the stars have ceased to give their light, the sun has been darkened, and the moon is not causing its light to shine. The heavens have trembled, because God has carried out the judgment He spoke against them.

Similar examples of this type of language which have been fulfilled are Amos 8.9, where Amos prophesied the destruction of Samaria. See Ezek. 32.7, 8, where Ezekiel foretold judgment against Egypt, and Jer. 4.23-24, 27-28, where Jeremiah revealed Judah's punishment at the hand of the Babylonians.

These passages illustrate the meaning of the same type of language Jesus used in Mt. 24.29. When some say, "Surely the world has never seen such," they simply are not aware of the way the Bible uses this type of language in reference to physical judgments which God carried out in the past, each with no reference to a final return of Christ at all.

6:14 And the heaven was removed as a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

"The heaven" here is the sky, and in John's vision, it was removed like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of place. This is language for the big shakeup that's coming

on Jerusalem, and it constitutes the first answer of heaven to the prayer of the martyrs for vengeance on their persecutors. In Isa. 34.4-5, we see this identical language used of a judgment by Babylon on Edom:

> 4 And all the host of heaven will wear away,
> And *the sky will be rolled up like a scroll*;
> All their hosts will also wither away
> As a leaf withers from the vine,
> Or as one withers from the fig tree.
> 5 For My sword is satiated in heaven,
> Behold it shall descend for *judgment upon Edom*,
> And upon the people whom I have devoted to
> destruction.

Has this statement been fulfilled? God carried out this judgment of Edom. It is no more!

The phrase "mountains and islands moving out of their places" was also used in Mic. 1.1-6 of God sending Assyria to punish Samaria and Jerusalem. Assyria carried Samaria and Jerusalem into captivity in 722 BC. This language used of national judgments was the only way the Jews had seen this language used.

6:15 And the kings of the earth (Gr. *ge*, the land)**, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains;**

The shakeup is coming on the land, and every level of society will be drastically affected, and none will escape. They will all "run for cover" in caves and mountains. We saw this language in our introductory chapter on martyr vindication because it comes from Isa. 2.19-21, depicting the reaction of the people to the destruction of Jerusalem on the day of Jehovah (v12) in Israel's last days (v1). (It's also used in Hos. 10.8 of Assyria's destruction of the northern kingdom in 721 BC):

> 19 And men will go into caves of the rocks, And into holes of the ground Before the terror of the LORD, And before the splendor of His majesty, When He arises to make the earth tremble. 20 In that day men will cast away to the moles and the bats Their idols of silver and their idols of gold, Which they made for themselves to worship, 21 In order to go into the cav-

> erns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs, Before the terror of the LORD and the splendor of His majesty, When He arises to make the earth tremble.

It's astounding that Jesus quotes this verse in Lk. 23.28-31 to the mourning women of Jerusalem he spoke to on the way to the cross, and applies it to the upcoming destruction of Jerusalem when God would purge the bloodshed of Jerusalem. The author of Hebrews quotes it in Heb. 12.26 and gives it the same application. Now, John quotes it in Rev. 6.16 and also applies it to the upcoming destruction of Babylon the harlot city, where Jesus was crucified! (Rev. 11.8)

6:16 and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

In Isaiah 2, this "heading for the hills" took place on the day of Jehovah. In the first gospel sermon in Ac. 2.15-21, Peter quotes Joel 2.28-32 using this language of the sun being turned to darkness and the moon to blood in the context of the day of the Lord in v20. In Joel 2.32b, Joel went ahead to speak of "those who escape"! The judgment depicted in all these passages was escapable. Jesus in Mt. 24.16 instructed the faithful to flee to the mountains, and history tells us they did exactly that.

In the next verse of Revelation, this day of Jehovah is called "the great day of their wrath." In 16.14, it's going to be called "the great day of God, the Almighty."

6:17 for the great day of their wrath is come; and who is able to stand?

This "great day of their (God's and Christ's) wrath" is the same as the "day of Jehovah" or "the day of the Lord" we've been seeing in the prophets, and as we said in 1.10, this was the Lord's day when John saw his vision in the Spirit.

We've now covered the opening of the first six seals. The first four depict the power of the Roman armies against Israel, and the next two depict the martyrs to be avenged, starting with tribulation on Old Covenant Israel. Before the opening of the seventh seal in 8.1, we have an interlude in chapter 7. This chapter will answer the question of who can withstand the great day of God's wrath that has come. Who is able to stand in view of such withering destruction? Most would think no one could, for it sounds like the destruction will overwhelm everyone.

Chapter 7

Sealing the People of God

Before we see the opening of the seventh seal in 8.1, we have an intermission in the vision John's been watching. This intermission will, among other things, answer the question at the conclusion of the previous chapter: who will be able to withstand the great day of the wrath of God the Almighty?

In Nahum 1.5-6, as God pronounces an upcoming judgment on Nineveh, he says:

> 5 Mountains quake because of Him,
> And the hills dissolve;
> Indeed the earth is upheaved by His presence,
> The world and all the inhabitants in it.
> 6 Who can stand before His indignation?
> Who can endure the burning of His anger?

This was the question that ended the previous chapter. In view of the chaotic, awesome, and terrifying judgment that was coming on the land of Palestine, Christians who are alive might wonder if they'll get lost in the chaos and turmoil of the onslaught—just who can endure such withering punishment, anyway? Can God possibly keep track of a peanut like me?

Revelation 7 answers that question.

7:1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**, holding the four winds of the earth** (Gr. *ge*, land)**, that no wind should blow on the earth** (Gr. *ge*, land)**, or on the sea, or upon any tree.**

At the mention of the four corners of the earth, many skeptics trumpet that the Bible can't possibly be inspired because look at the

mistaken science in it. "Who believes the earth has corners. The men who wrote the Bible believed in a flat earth!"

First, none of us believes in a flat earth, but we still speak of the four corners of the earth, and how our military is in all four corners of the earth. Second, John's not speaking of the four corners of the planet, for the word translated "earth" here is *ge*, the root of our words geography, geology, etc., and it means soil, dust, or land, as in the land of Israel, the land of Benjamin, or the land of Palestine. These four angels are standing at the four corners of Palestine, holding the winds of that land, so that they won't blow on the land.

In the Bible, winds are many times spoken of as destructive force from God. In Jer. 25.32, as he foretells Babylon's coming in judgment against Judah, Jeremiah says:

> Thus says the LORD of hosts,
> Behold, evil is going forth
> From nation to nation,
> And a great storm is being stirred up
> From the remotest parts of the earth.

In Jer. 49.36, Jeremiah speaks of a scattering wind coming upon Elam, a neighbor nation of Judah:

> And I shall bring upon Elam the four winds
> From the four ends of heaven,
> And shall scatter them to all these winds;
> And there will be no nation
> To which the outcasts of Elam will not go.

See also Jer. 51.1, where Babylon was spoken of as a destroying wind against Judah. Winds were instruments of God's destruction on many occasions.

Thus, these angels are holding back destruction from Old Covenant Israel for a specific time and purpose.

7:2 And I saw another angel ascend from the sunrising, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a great voice to the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **and the sea,**

Another angel comes from the East, around the eastern border of the Roman Empire, and he's sealed by God, showing his ownership by God and his approval by God, and he hollers "Stop!" to the angels controlling the four destructive winds.

7:3 saying, Hurt not the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we shall have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.**

"Hurt not the land," or hold off until we have sealed the servants of God on their foreheads – mark those that belong to God, before winds are turned loose. Since the judgments are coming on the land or the earth, that's where these servants of God are, on the land.

Foreheads would represent the intellectual service of God's servants. In a little while, we'll see servants sealed or marked on their forehead and their right hand, depicting their labors of service, hence service with one's brains and brawn.

There are a number of examples of such sealing or marking in the Bible. One of the best is Ezek 9.1-6, where God is about to punish Jerusalem for their idolatrous worship in the temple:

> 1 Then He cried out in my hearing with a loud voice saying, Draw near, O executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand. 2 And behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate which faces north, each with his shattering weapon in his hand; and among them was a certain man clothed in linen with a writing case at his loins. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar…And He called to the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case. 4 And the LORD said to him, Go through the midst of the city, even through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst. 5 But to the others He said in my hearing, Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity, and do not spare. 6 Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but *do not touch any man on whom is the mark;* and you shall start from My sanctuary.

Thus, God was marking his faithful people in Jerusalem, to protect them from the onslaught that was coming. We'll see this same type of procedure in Revelation. And it is similar to Amos 9.8-9, where, when God is about to destroy the Northern Kingdom of Israel, he says:

> 8 Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom,

> And I will destroy it from the face of the earth;
> Nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob,
> Declares the LORD.
> 9 For behold, I am commanding,
> And I will shake the house of Israel among all nations
> As grain is shaken in a sieve,
> But not a kernel will fall to the ground.

God is bringing Assyria to judge Israel, but he'll just destroy the chaff, not a single kernel of grain, representing his faithful people, will be lost.

As we're going to see in Revelation 13-14, everyone has a seal, either from God or from Satan. In II Tim. 2.19, Paul teaches that Christians have been sealed:

> Howbeit the firm foundation of God standeth, *having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his:*

Thus, before God destroys Jerusalem in Jesus' generation to vindicate the martyrs as Jesus had promised: two groups of God's people are going to be marked or sealed to protect them from being punished indiscriminately.

7:4 And I heard the number of them that were sealed, a hundred and forty and four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel:

The first group to be sealed for protection are 144,000 Jewish saints on the land, 12,000 out of each of the 12 tribes. These would be faithful Jewish saints who hadn't heard the gospel yet, as well as those in Peter's audience for the first gospel sermon in Acts 2, whom he warned to "save yourselves from this crooked generation." Through their obedience to the gospel, they had done exactly that.

At the mention of 144,000, many readers will think "Oh, this is the passage that the Jehovah's Witnesses like to emphasize." That's true: the Jehovah's Witnesses think that the 144,000 are their elites (clergy?). They're the ones that actually get to go to heaven, while the laity, their other members, will spend eternity here on a revitalized earth. They also believe that only the 144,000 can understand the Bible. The laity cannot, and most of the ones who come to your door don't believe they're of the 144,000 cannot understand a word of it, and you, as a non-Jehovah's Witness, certainly cannot. (For documentation of these

teachings, please see "Jehovah's Witnesses: Are They Really?" in the author's *Denominational Doctrines: Explained, Examined, & Exposed*). When they come around wanting to study the Bible with you, remember that they believe neither you nor they can understand a word of it, and therefore it's pure subterfuge for them to offer to study with you.

7:5 Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand: Of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand;

7:6 Of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand;

7:7 Of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand;

7:8 Of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

John wasn't teaching Watchtower doctrine here, but he was teaching the safety of Jewish saints from the coming judgment on Palestine. We'll see these again in 14.4, where they are spoken of as virgin Jewish men (not including Gentiles or many Jehovah's Witnesses), and the firstfruits of the lamb unto God; that is, they included the first Christians who came out of Judaism, of course.

It's doubtful that all the tribes had the same number of saints in them. Many oriental peoples, including Jews have a real interest in numerology, an interest in the significance of numbers. In the Bible, we see many times where 3 is the heavenly number, representing the number of persons in the Godhead. The number 4 is the number of the earth, the number of directions on the planet. The sum of those numbers, 7, is emphasized completeness, the product of them, even more so. The number 1,000 represents many, and the product of all these numbers, 12x12x1,000 represents all of a great many. This number is not a literal number of the Old Covenant saints, but it is fixed, and will not be changing. Since the Mosaic Law is just about to be put out of business when Jerusalem is destroyed (no more temple, sacrifices, priesthood, genealogical tables, etc.) there would be no more Old Covenant saints, but God wants them to know assuredly that he knows every last faithful Israelite on the land.

NOTE: In this listing of the tribes of Israel, the tribes of Dan and Ephraim are not there, and the tribe of Joseph is represented by his son Ephraim.

In the next verse, another group of saints is noted.

7:9 After these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands;

This second group is much larger than the first, and it is both Gentile and Jewish Christians out of all nations. They're Christians because they're in white robes, thus pure from the blood of Christ, and righteous, as the robes represent their righteous acts. They're carrying palms, the same symbol of victory Jesus was greeted with at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem the last week of his life. This group is innumerable because it's constantly growing as more people are exposed to the gospel and are coming into Christ. Thus, the first group is Old Covenant saints and the second is New Covenant saints. Though this second group is not specifically said to be sealed, 22.4 does, and it will be clear that even if these saints die, God knows them and takes them to be with him.

7:10 and they cry with a great voice, saying, Salvation unto our God who sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb.

These New Covenant saints ascribe their salvation to God and Christ. God is the one who planned their salvation, executed his plan for it, and he's still securing it. Most Jews didn't ascribe their salvation to Christ.

7:11 And all the angels were standing round about the throne, and about the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,

All these angels, elders, and the four living creatures gathered around the throne of God fall down on their faces in worship of God. In Revelation, we'll see John doing the same thing, and often in the Bible, human beings confronted with angelic beings are fearful and instantly fall on their faces as though they were dead. As we said in Chapter 1, this evidently made them feel better than anything else! Keep this in mind, for someday, you may well get your chance to test it.

As these impressive beings worship God, they are:

7:12 saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

As these powerful beings ascribed these seven traits to God, they clinch it with an "Amen," meaning, truly, indeed, or "that's right!" There's no doubt in their minds!

7:13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, These that are arrayed in white robes, who are they, and whence came they?

One of the twenty four elders asked John who these people in the great multitude are, and where did they come from. John, still reeling from the vision he's seeing, declines to answer. From 3.5, we know who they are from the statement Jesus made to the church in Sardis:

> *He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments;* and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

Thus, these New Covenant saints are overcomers: they've endured persecution and tribulation unto death.

7:14 And I say unto him, My lord, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they that come of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

This elder remarkably explains that these New Covenant saints literally "are coming" (a present participle) out of the great tribulation by enduring to the death! "Tribulation" means pressure. Dispensational premillennialists in our day claim the great tribulation hasn't occurred yet, even though Jesus said it would occur in his generation and these saints had come out of it! Just try telling them it hadn't occurred yet! Jesus, in Mt. 24.15-21, had warned of this great tribulation:

> 15 When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand), 16 then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains: 17 let him that is on the housetop not go down to take out things that are in his house: 18 and let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak. 19 But woe unto them that are with child and to

> them that give suck in those days! 20 And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on a sabbath: 21 for *then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be.*

In verse 30 of that same text, Jesus said that "all these things" would be fulfilled in his generation. John, who lived in Jesus' generation, was in that tribulation (1.9), and now he sees a horde of other Christians who have come out of it and are no longer under the pressure John was. *They got out of it by dying, and are now martyrs in the presence of Christ.*

Jesus refers to a prophecy of Daniel's of this same tribulation in Dan. 12.1:

> Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And *there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time;* and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.

Jesus said the great tribulation would be inaugurated when they saw the abomination of desolation, an abomination which makes desolate, standing in the holy place in the temple of Jerusalem (Mt. 24.15). The Christians in Jerusalem were to immediately head for the hills, escape the city, to avoid the tribulation unique in all history. It was in this context that Jesus said in Lk. 17.32, "Remember Lot's wife"! Josephus records that faithful Christians did exactly that, escaping to Pella for the remainder of the war between the Jews and the Romans.

7:15 Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them.

As John is shown what has happened to these New Covenant martyrs, he sees that they're with Christ in his temple (dwelling place), in heaven, before the throne of God, and God's tabernacle (tent, shelter) is spread over them. Actually, they had been in the messianic temple since the time they'd obeyed the gospel, as we saw in our comments on 1.6.

Notice what these martyred saints are doing. Many times people have the concept that in heaven, we're going to be resting on couches,

every once in a while getting up to go over and worship God, sing a few songs, and then go back to the couch to rest again. After a few thousand years of that, someone might say, "Heaven sounds like a really boring place; that sounds like hell to me!" Of course, the Bible nowhere teaches that. That picture wasn't true in Eden, it's not true while we're still on the earth, and it won't be true in heaven. It's a place of hustling, bustling activity serving God day and night with all their ability.

7:16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat:

They, and these only for the time being, no longer hunger (after the famine they'd been subjected to during the war between the Jews and Romans), nor thirst, nor are exposed to the searing Palestine heat trying to survive famine before they had died and escaped tribulation.

7:17 for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.

These martyrs are with Christ, he's guiding them to luxuriant waters of life, and any tears they might have now will be wiped away by God. We will see every descriptive phrase here again in chapters 21 and 22 applied more broadly to all citizens of New Jerusalem after Old Covenant Jerusalem was destroyed

So, chapter 7 is two pictures showing 1) Old Covenant saints, of whom God knows every one, and 2) Christian martyrs, victims of the tribulation, already in heaven with Christ, relieved of all their difficulties, and receiving their eternal reward.

Chapter 8

Seventh Seal, First Four Trumpets

After the intermission following the first six seals to assure faithful Christians that they wouldn't be swallowed up in overwhelming judgments, we now learn of the seventh seal and the first four trumpets. Seals *reveal* the coming judgment on Old Covenant Israel, trumpets *warn* of that judgment, and in chapters to come, bowls of wrath will *execute* that judgment.

8:1 And when he opened the seventh seal, there followed a silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.

Recall that Christ is the one opening these seals, as he's the only one qualified to reveal their contents and guarantee their execution.

Though some wags use the silence of this passage to argue that there were no women in heaven, some women use it to argue that there are no preachers there. Silence in this instance is an attention-getting device. Public speakers will pause in their delivery for several seconds or more so that people who aren't paying proper attention will stop whatever they're doing to look up at the speaker to see what's wrong. Periods of silence during radio and television broadcasts serve the same purpose—to galvanize attention. After all the commotion, huge choirs singing praise, angels with great voices, thunders, etc., such a period of silence will be a very effective attention-getter. Similarly, in Zech. 2.13, God was about to bring Babylon over to conquer Judah, and Zechariah says: "Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD; for He is aroused from His holy habitation," referring to the awe that God was to be held in at such a time, a time like John was living in Revelation. In Hab. 2.20, Habakkuk speaks of Judah's idols that don't breath and don't speak, in contrast to the true God, who his people should view as: "But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent be-

fore Him." In Zeph. 1.7, Zephaniah, foretelling the coming of Babylon on Judah said:

> Be silent before the Lord GOD!
> For the day of the LORD is near,
> For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice,
> He has consecrated His guests.

Looking at the context of Zephaniah shows that the day of the Lord was like that of John's in Revelation, the day when he would destroy Jerusalem in 586 BC. The sacrifice God had prepared was the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants themselves, entirely similar to our story in Revelation.

8:2 And I saw the seven angels that stand before God; and there were given unto them seven trumpets.

Trumpets were tools of the military, used to communicate with a mass of troops. They were to Romans and Jews what sirens are to us. If we hear a siren, it's warning of something, such as a fire, tornado, police pursuing someone, etc. Their very purpose is to arrest your attention. So with trumpets. Numbers 10.1-10 gives the best description of their use in the Bible. They were used to assemble people, break camp, warn of danger, attack, retreat, etc. In I Cor. 14.7-9, in speaking of the necessity of having an interpreter present while a tongue-speaker was exercising his gift, Paul alluded to the purpose of a trumpet:

> 7 Even things without life, giving a voice, whether pipe or harp, if they give not a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? 8 *For if the trumpet give an uncertain voice, who shall prepare himself for war?* 9 So also ye, unless ye utter by the tongue speech easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye will be speaking into the air.

In this case, they're going to be used to warn of judgments coming on "the land" of Palestine. We'll see seven warnings from God against the persecutor of his people, Jerusalem.

8:3 And another angel came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should add it unto the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

This angel is at the same altar where the martyrs were who prayed the important prayer of Rev. 6.9-10. Censers were firepans for moving incense and coals of fire around the altar. Incense is a substance burned to produce a fragrant sweet odor, so this angel added much incense to the prayers of the persecuted saints to make them more acceptable to God. Obviously, this calls to mind Paul's teaching on prayer in Rom. 8.26-27:

> 26 And in like manner the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity: for we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered; 27 and he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Paul says that Christians have infirmities (weaknesses) in prayer; many times we don't know how to pray. Sometimes we ask for the wrong things. Sometimes we seek an improper timetable. The martyrs under the altar in 6.9-11 wanted God to avenge their blood much quicker than God was willing to do, so they were told to wait for a little while until more Christians could be killed. Thus, even those martyrs didn't know how to pray as they ought.

A major solution to this weakness is the Holy Spirit interceding between us and God, thus making our prayers more acceptable to God, just as this incense did. The incense being added was surely representative of the Spirit's work in making prayers more palatable to God.

8:4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand.

8:5 And the angel taketh the censer; and he filled it with the fire of the altar, and cast it upon the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**: and there followed thunders, and voices, and lightnings, and an earthquake.**

The angel then takes his firepan and casts a pan full of fire from the altar down onto the land of Palestine, to the reaction in heaven of thunders, voices, lightnings, and an earthquake. Now that all the saints are marked for their protection, these were signs of the energy and power contained in the coming judgments on the land. In Ezek. 10.2, an angel did the same thing over Jerusalem before Babylon's conquest of Jerusalem.

Recall in Lk. 12.49, where Jesus said, "I came to cast fire upon the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)." Through his angelic agent, he's doing that very thing to the same land in this vision.

8:6 And the seven angels that had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

8:7 And the first sounded, and there followed hail and fire, mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**: and the third part of the earth** (Gr. *ge*, land) **was burnt up, and the third part of the trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.**

When the first trumpet sounded its warning, hail, fire, and blood were cast upon the land, and a third part of the land, trees, and grass was burned up. This wasn't a complete judgment on Palestine, but only a partial one, an attempt to get Old Covenant Israel to repent. Josephus, the Jewish general who defended Palestine against the Roman General Vespasian (whom the emperor Nero had sent there) in the early part of the Jewish-Roman war, relates the early battles in Galilee, the northern third of Palestine:

> Nor did the Romans...leave off either by night or by day, burning the places in the plain...and killing...so that Galilee was all over filled with *fire* and *blood.* (Josephus, Flavius, *Wars*, 3.4.1)

> In a tremendous barrage catapults shot lances into the air, and stones weighing a talent (about 47 lbs.) were discharged...together with firebrands and a hail of arrows...a host of Arab bowmen with all the javelin-men and slingers let go simultaneously with the artillery fire." (*Ibid.*, 3.7.9)

From Josephus' testimony, the fire and hail was undoubtedly the ammunition the Romans used for their catapults: lances, stones, firebrands, and arrows, which would certainly produce the blood.

8:8 And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood;

The second trumpet portends a partial judgment on the sea. In the Roman-Jewish war, there were a number of naval battles on the seas. There are four seas receiving attention in the Bible: Sea of Galilee,

Mediterranean Sea, the Dead Sea, and the Red Sea. Vespasian fought the Jewish navy on the Sea of Galilee, and he also had naval operations at Joppa, on the Mediterranean, and Old Covenant Israel was on the losing end on both those seas. That may be what this trumpet represents. Josephus wrote concerning the incident at Joppa:

> Towards dawn they were struck by a violent gale...It dashed some of the ships...onto the rocks...A wide area of sea was stained with blood and the coast was covered with corpses; the Romans, lining the beach, killed those who were cast up...The number of bodies..came to 4,200. (*Ibid.*, 3.9.3)

8:9 and there died the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, even they that had life; and the third part of the ships was destroyed.

8:10 And the third angel sounded, and there fell from heaven a great star, burning as a torch, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of the waters;

Again, this star couldn't have been a literal one, for the puniest star is so much greater in magnitude than the area that our earth takes up. It would take 1.5 million earths to fill our modest sun, which wouldn't begin to compare to any significant star. The third angel and trumpet probably foretell partial judgments on the rivers and their headwaters. This may be saying no more than the Jewish sources of drinking water were polluted during the war. However, there's an alternate view on this. Since "stars" are used in the Bible to represent prominent persons (like our "Hollywood stars"), or the King of Babylon in Isa. 14.12 (see v4) as the "star of the morning," some think this great star that fell was actually Josephus himself. As we've previously noticed, Josephus was a prominent Jewish general whose responsibility was the defense of Galilee, and he defended the Jewish town of Jotapota against Vespasian. Josephus, a notable personage indeed, was defeated with the loss of 40,000 men, though his own life was spared by Vespasian, who made him his official historian. This, of course, made him highly unpopular with the remainder of the Jews, who viewed him as a defector, and they become very bitter with their former hero. Josephus himself relates this:

> When...it was learned that he (Josephus–SGD) was alive in Roman hands, and that he was being treated

> by the commanding officers with a respect no prisoner could expect, they demonstrated as much anger with him for living as they had formerly expressed sorrow...The citizens were maddened by their reverses, and their disasters only added fuel to the flames...and goaded them to further calamities...They therefore resolved to fall on the Romans the more vehemently. (*Ibid.*, 3.9.5 & 6)

Since the partial judgments on the land and sea were physical judgments, I tend to accept the former interpretation of this judgment on the fresh water sources.

8:11 and the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

Wormwood was a plant which had a very bitter flavor. In Lamentations 3.19, Jeremiah wrote sitting in the rubble of Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem: "Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness."

8:12 And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; that the third part of them should be darkened, and the day should not shine for the third part of it, and the night in like manner.

The fourth angel and trumpet sounded, and there was a partial darkness of the sun, moon, and stars, affecting both the day and night. When Jesus foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, he used language historically used of national or regional judgments in the prophets like, "the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood." The Jews had never heard this language used of anything but physical judgments. That day was a "dark day," for the Jews, though the sun may have been shining brightly. It was the day the Romans "knocked their lights out." The stock market crashed on a dark day in 1929, but that has no reference to how sunny or cloudy the weather that day was on Wall street. In line with this, this fourth partial judgment didn't destroy Jerusalem, or knock her lights out, but it did dim them somewhat.

Thus, it appears that these first four trumpets represent partial judgments on the land, the seas, the rivers and their headwaters, and the sun, moon, and stars.

8:13 And I saw, and I heard an eagle, flying in mid heaven, saying with a great voice, Woe, woe, woe, for them that dwell on the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**, by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, who are yet to sound.**

The eagle was the symbol of the Roman army, like it's the symbol of the United States, which makes us think of the eagle as a noble bird. It's actually a vulture, which may be it's function here, to clean up the carrion of the land's defeat. The "woes" are the groans of the people of the land suffering this calamity. The next chapter will take up the last three trumpets or warnings of imminent judgment on the land. If the Jews in Palestine think the first four warnings were bad, they're going to get worse, all the way through chapter 11.

Chapter 9

The Fifth and Sixth Trumpets and Two Woes

In the previous chapter, we saw the first four trumpets blasting out warnings of partial judgments on the land of Palestine. We now continue with the remainder of the trumpets and begin a series of woes.

9:1 And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven fallen unto the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**: and there was given to him the key of the pit of the abyss.**

This star falling to the land is not a literal star, but a "him," a person. We mentioned in the previous chapter "stars" being used in this way. Star here is being used like we use the word figuratively, e.g., the stars of Hollywood. For other examples of stars being used of prominent persons, see Num. 22.17, where the messiah is spoken of as a star. In Rev. 1.20, we saw seven stars which were seven angels. We've seen the example in Isa. 14.12-13, where the king of Babylon is a star by the name of Lucifer (the only occurrence of this word in the KJV version of the Bible):

> 12 How you have fallen from heaven,
> O star of the morning, son of the dawn!
> You have been cut down to the earth,
> You who have weakened the nations!
> 13 But you said in your heart,
> I will ascend to heaven;
> I will raise my throne above the stars of God,
> And I will sit on the mount of assembly
> In the recesses of the north.

In Isa. 14.4, Isaiah was told to take up a taunt on *the King of Babylon*. That's the day star or star of the morning he spoke of. "Star of the morning," a bright or morning star, is the word translated Lucifer in the KJV. Extravagant doctrines about Satan have been formulated from this one instance of Lucifer in one major translation, all worthless, for God himself told Isaiah he was talking about the king of Babylon.

In Rev. 9.1, this star is a prominent person (he may even be Satan, or an agent of Satan), and he's given the key of the abyss. That the abyss is probably Hades is seen from Rom. 10.4-7, where Paul says that the abyss is where Christ was after he died:

> 6 But the righteousness which is of faith saith thus,
> Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend into heaven?
> (that is, to bring Christ down:) 7 or, Who shall de-
> scend into the abyss? (That is, to bring Christ up from
> the dead.)

This points us toward Satan or an agent of his as the one who has the power over Hades, which in 20.14 will be destroyed in the lake of fire.

9:2 And he opened the pit of the abyss; and there went up a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

This star/person uses the key he's been given to open the pit of the abyss, and smoke pours forth and darkens the sun and the air, again, a partial judgment on the sun, a dark day on the land, if you please.

9:3 And out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**; and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth** (Gr. *ge*, land) **have power.**

The smoke from the abyss produces locusts on the land, not literal locusts, but they are sent to torment only certain people on that land. Joel 1.4-6 provides a good illustration of how the prophets used locusts for punishments on nations:

> 4 What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming lo-
> cust has eaten;
> And what the swarming locust has left, the creeping
> locust has eaten;
> And what the creeping locust has left, the stripping lo-
> cust has eaten.

5 Awake, drunkards, and weep;
And wail, all you wine drinkers,
On account of the sweet wine
That is cut off from your mouth.
6 For a nation has invaded my land,
Mighty and without number;
Its teeth are the teeth of a lion,
And it has the fangs of a lioness.

When God says that a nation has invaded his land, he's speaking of Assyria invading the northern kingdom of Israel and the resulting damage to the land of Israel. This is exactly how John sees the locusts being used in Revelation 9.

9:4 And it was said unto them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**, neither any green thing, neither any tree, but only such men as have not the seal of God on their foreheads.**

These locusts are not permitted to attack real vegetation, but rather men who aren't sealed by God; that is, they don't belong to God, they're not approved of God, nor are they destined to be with God. These are rebellious Jews in the land of Palestine. God's protection of the ones that are sealed to him is implied.

9:5 And it was given them that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when it striketh a man.

The locusts are not permitted to kill these rebellious inhabitants of the land, but only torment them five months, the lifespan of literal locusts, and also the length of Titus' siege of Jerusalem.

It is likely that these locusts represent the roving bands of Jewish zealots inside the walls of Jerusalem, not Roman soldiers. Josephus said that there were three major factions of these zealots who were worse than the Roman soldiers, and in the end, killed many more Jews than the Romans did during the siege.

9:6 And in those days men shall seek death, and shall in no wise find it; and they shall desire to die, and death fleeth from them.

Josephus said that the men who weren't killed would seek death, even though they would desire (lit., lust for) it, death would elude them. During the famines, many of which were brought on by the zealots who were warring among themselves and against the general population, conditions were so severe and people were so emaciated that

some mothers were eating their own infant children, and bargaining with other mothers for their babies. Josephus said concerning these zealots and seditionists:

> They did not limit their audacity to raids and brigandage, but proceeded to commit murders...beginning with the most eminent citizens...the brigands rose to such heights of madness, that they actually took over the appointment of the high priests...fell upon the population and butchered them like a herd of unclean animals...They were flogged and racked...Twelve thousand of the youthful nobility died in this way. (*Wars*, 4.3.4, 6, 4.5.3, and 4.6.3)

This behavior had been prophesied of Old Covenant Israel as far back as the woes and curses of Dt. 28-30 and Zech. 11.4-14.

9:7 And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared for war; and upon their heads as it were crowns like unto gold, and their faces were as men's faces.

Again, horse-shaped locusts were not literal locusts, for they were wearing crowns (Gr. *stephanos*), victory crowns. These are likely Roman soldiers who were used to victory, and were carrying out their desires for vengeance on the Jews within the walls of Jerusalem.

9:8 And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions.

There was a variety of locusts that were somewhat bushy to which the "hair of women" evidently refers, and these tormentors had the teeth of lions, and the hair of women. Paul tells us in I Cor. 11.15 that there is such a thing: a woman's long hair is given to her for her glory.

9:9 And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to war.

9:10 And they have tails like unto scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men five months.

These figurative locusts have tails like scorpions to torment the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and they torment them for their entire life cycle. This torment may well be the internal suffering the Jews in Jerusalem suffered at the hands of their own countrymen, the roving bands of zealots.

9:11 They have over them as king the angel of the abyss: his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek tongue he hath the name Apollyon.

These locusts also have a king (literal locusts don't, Prov. 30.27), the king of the abyss, and John is told that his name in both Hebrew and Greek is "the destroyer." Then the angel announcing this trumpet/woe pronounces that the first woe has an end.

9:12 The first Woe is past: behold, there come yet two Woes hereafter.

9:13 And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the horns of the golden altar which is before God,

The sixth angel's trumpet introduces a voice from the horns of the altar of incense near God's throne in John's vision. The horns of the altar represented the power of God, as the horns of a billy goat or ram represent its power. This powerful voice gives orders to the four angels holding the four winds we were introduced to in 7.1.

9:14 one saying to the sixth angel that had one trumpet, Loose the four angels that are bound at the great river Euphrates.

9:15 And the four angels were loosed, that had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, that they should kill the third part of men.

These four announce a partial judgment (only a third part of men were killed) on the land which was not accidental, random, or coincidental. Forces of destruction (as we've already seen that winds were) were partial punishments prepared for that precise time: the hour, day, month, and year. Recall that Jesus, in discussing the destruction of Jerusalem coming in his generation in Mt. 24.36, said that even he didn't know the day or the hour that Jerusalem was going to be besieged. As John sees this vision approximately a third of a century later, Christ now knows the precise time the great tribulation like the world had never seen was prepared to be delivered right down to the hour, day, month, and year.

In Ezek. 5, Ezekiel, while in Babylonian captivity before Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 596 BC, was told to use a razor to shave his hair and beard. One third of the hair he was to burn with fire, one third he was to chop up and scatter around, and the last third he was to scatter to the wind. He was to take a few hairs and put them in his belt. This enactment represented the partial judgments

coming on Judah and Jerusalem. Some were to be burned, some chopped up by swords, and some would be scattered to the winds. A few, represented by the few hairs surviving in Ezekiel's belt, would be preserved as a faithful remnant of Jews. These partial judgments remind us of what John's seeing in his visions.

The voice that authorized the loosening of these four angels said that they were coming from the river Euphrates, the eastern boundary between Rome's territory and that of the Parthians. More help for the Roman military in the vicinity of Jerusalem was coming. Historically, a Roman general, there with tens of thousands more troops to throw into the fray with the Jews, met Vespasian at Megiddo, a staging area.

In the Olivet discourse (Mt. 24.13, 15-17), Jesus had told his faithful disciples that that they would be saved from all this torment if they endured to the end, the end of the age (Gr. *aeon*) as in vv. 4, 6, 14, and when they saw the abomination of desolation spoken of through Daniel, they were to flee Jerusalem to the mountains. Josephus tells us that they fled to Pella, in eastern Palestine for the duration of the war.

9:16 And the number of the armies of the horsemen was twice ten thousand times ten thousand: I heard the number of them.

If John actually saw a hoard of two hundred million horsemen coming toward Palestine, it wasn't possibly a literal number, for Rome didn't have that many people in their entire empire, much less that many horsemen. That this wasn't a literal army that huge is further evidenced in the next verse, as they're not equipped with literal battle dress, and they're not riding literal horses. Mills, in his *Revelation – Survey and Research*, depends on the Syriac transation of Revelation to point out that this horde consisted only of two legions of Roman soldiers, or 20,000, in accord with Josephus (*Wars*, Book 6, chp 4, 1, 2).

9:17 And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates as of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone: and the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceedeth fire and smoke and brimstone.

Fire, smoke, and brimstone (sulfur) was snorted out of these lion-headed horses, again in partial judgment on the land of Palestine.

9:18 By these three plagues was the third part of men killed, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone, which proceeded out of their mouths.

A Dutch Professor S. Greijdanus, in a commentary on Revelation published in 1908, gave this highly sensational interpretation on this verse:

> Doesn't this fire and smoke and sulphur coming out of the mouth of the horses make us think of gunpowder and dynamite, as used in guns, cannons and machine guns, all three of which spew fire and smoke and sulphur out of their mouths with such explosive noise that it makes you shake? These weapons do not shrink back; they are horrible in their operation. Add the bombs and other explosives—"hellish weapons," as they are often called—that are used to cause death and destruction on a large scale. *These things bring us closer to what John saw in his vision.* (S. Greijdanus, cited by C. Vanderwaal, *Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy*, St. Catherines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1978, p. 91)

Greijdanus, no doubt impressed by the weaponry of war at the time of World War I, was like Hal Lindsey, tugboat pilot-*cum*-prophecy expert of our time for whom the atom bomb was the key that opened up the meaning of such visions:

> All of these things are part of a thermonuclear war: smoke represents the immense clouds of radioactive fallout and debris, while brimstone is simply melted earth and building materials...I personally believe that the "four evil angels" who will be unbound at the River Euphrates will instantly mobilize a giant war machine made up of some of the oriental countries, primarily Red China.... (Hal Lindsey, *There's a New World Coming*, Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, p. 141-142. 1984.)

Obviously, the first-century recipients being persecuted by Jews received a blessing when they read and understood that only 2000 years hence, Red Chinese thermonuclear weapons would appear on the scene! Thanks be to God! Seriously, both these comments are absurd in the extreme. The original readers of this book would not and could not have had any such far-fetched understanding of John's words.

9:19 For the power of the horses is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails are like unto serpents, and have heads; and with them they hurt.

These horses could trample people head-on, or they could sting them with their tails. There was no escaping them, as they could hurt you coming and going.

9:20 And the rest of mankind, who were not killed with these plagues, repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and the idols of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of stone, and of wood; which can neither see, nor hear, nor walk:

The rest of mankind were those land-dwellers who weren't sealed by God and were left after a third of them were killed. Partial judgments were designed to produce repentance to avoid further, worse judgments. In Heb. 6.6, the author warned of Jews who were so hardened that it was "impossible to renew them again unto repentance." These didn't repent of their idolatry (this may refer to early idolatrous worship instituted by the Romans, or of their sins against each other that are mentioned in the next verse) at all! The worship of demons is idolatry, as described by Paul in I Cor. 1.10, 20, where he says, "But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have communion with demons."

9:21 and they repented not of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.

Josephus relates the internal destruction and squalor of Jerusalem that the Romans found when they arrived. Titus was so moved by their sad condition that he pled with the Jews to surrender in order to save their city, but they wouldn't have it. They repented of nothing. Moses had warned of the sad end of their wicked and perverse generation before they ever entered the promised land. Various prophets had warned of the destruction awaiting them. John the Baptist had warned them that God's axe was lying at the root of the tree. Jesus and his apostles had given them numerous warnings. And now a pagan general took a run at them, and they were having none of it.

As we start chapter 10, we might expect the seventh and last angel to sound his trumpet of warning, but before that happens, John sees another interlude in his vision.

Chapter 10

John Eats the Little Book

After the last chapter, we're ready for the sixth trumpet to be sounded, but this chapter is another interlude in which we're presented with two more encouraging pictures for faithful saints on the earth (the land) in vv 1-7. We'll have two more in 10.8-11.13. Then, the main vision will resume and John will see the fall of Jerusalem.

10:1 And I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, arrayed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire;

When John sees this strong angel, he says "the rainbow" was upon his head. The definite article is in the Greek text. Of course, any rainbow in the Bible would remind us of God's faithfulness to his promise after the flood. "The rainbow" has much more significance in scripture than just that occurrence. When God met with Moses and the seventy elders of Israel there was a rainbow present. In Rev. 6.9-10, the scene of the souls of the martyrs under the altar, there was a rainbow on the scene as they were promised that their martyrdom would be avenged in a little while. The rainbow here makes us take notice of the promise of the coming destruction of Jerusalem with peace to follow for the saints of God, whether martyred or not.

This angel's face as the sun would prevent any human being from gazing into it, while his feet as pillars of fire would emphasize the strength of his stance. No one is going to topple this fellow off his pins!

10:2 and he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left upon the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**;**

10:3 and he cried with a great voice, as a lion roareth: and when he cried, the seven thunders uttered their voices.

This strong angel stands astride the sea and the land (presumably the land of Palestine) and while he shouts with the great voice of a lion. In Amos 3.4, 8, Amos says:

> 4 Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey?...
> 8 A lion has roared! Who will not fear?

Surely, those same thoughts were going through John's mind. John hears seven thunders, an indication of a coming storm. John noticed a little scroll in the angel's hand.

10:4 And when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying, Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.

John got excited about what he saw and was going to write an account of it, but he was forbidden by a heavenly voice telling him to seal up what he heard and not write it.

10:5 And the angel that I saw standing upon the sea and upon the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **lifted up his right hand to heaven,**

Commentaries on Revelation go to great lengths to speculate what the seven thunders said, but no one knows. I could give you my guess, but you'd have to tape a quarter to it to make it worth throwing away. We can easily be satisfied with that, as Moses said in Dt. 29.29:

> The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever...

The angel lifts his right hand to heaven, the stance for taking an oath, an act which honors God. In Dt. 6.13, God told Israel:

> You shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him, and swear by His name.

Similarly, in Dt. 10.20, Moses commanded:

> You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name.

Some think that Jesus, in Mt. 5.33-37, forbade his people from taking oaths and calling God for a witness. Jesus, as a faithful rabbi teaching the Mosaic law, couldn't teach differently from Moses, and he didn't. Jesus forbade trivial oaths that were customary among the Jews

of his time. For further discussion of oaths, please see "The Sermon on the Mount – Part I, in the author's *The Teaching of Jesus: From Sinai to Gehenna, A Faithful Rabbi Urgently Warns Rebellious Israel*.

So, let's notice what this angel swears to:

10:6 and sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created the heaven and the things that are therein, and the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **and the things that are therein, and the sea and the things that are therein, that there shall be delay no longer:**

The strong angel makes an oath "that there shall be delay no longer." The KJV has "there shall be time no more." A favorite hymn of many reads, "When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound and time shall be no more," is obviously taken from this verse, but all newer translations use "delay." There is no statement in the entire Bible correctly translated "end of time," or "time no more." Men have invented the concept of the end of time and moved a lot of events in the Bible off to that imaginary point of no time.

The "delay" spoken of is that issued to the martyrs in 6.9-10 who wanted immediate vengeance on their persecutors. They were told to rest for a little time until some more saints were killed. That little time was used to assure the faithful that they wouldn't be lost in the shuffle, and now the time is up. It's time for judgment on their adversaries.

10:7 but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then is finished the mystery of God, according to the good tidings which he declared to his servants the prophets.

The angel then explains that when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, God's mystery, that he declared through the prophets, would be finished. A mystery is something that wasn't revealed at one time, but in this case it now has been. In Eph. 1.3, Paul speaks of God's eternal plan of salvation in Christ before the foundation of the world. He speaks of this plan as a mystery in Eph. 3.3-6:

> 3 how that by revelation was made known unto me *the mystery*, as I wrote before in few words, 4 whereby, when ye read, ye can perceive my understanding in the *mystery of Christ*; 5 which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men, as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to wit, *that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel*,

Again in Rom. 11.25, Paul speaks of this mystery:

> For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this *mystery*, lest ye be wise in your own conceits, that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in;

and in Rom. 16.25-26, he says:

> 25 Now to him that is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of *the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal, 26 but now is manifested,* and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, is made known unto all the nations unto obedience of faith:

One last passage referring to God's mystery spoken through the prophets is I Pet. 1.10-12. In the previous verse, Peter has mentioned their salvation, and then he says:

> 10 Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: 11 searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them. 12 To whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto you, did they minister these things, which now have been announced unto you through them that preached the gospel unto you by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven; which things angels desire to look into.

So the prophets in the Old Testament foretold salvation in the messiah, yet they didn't know when and how those prophecies would be fulfilled.

God's mystery is spoken of many more times in the New Testament, but we now want to notice some Old Testament references to it, particularly as they apply to martyr vindication as we're seeing it consummated in Revelation.

In the Old Testament prophets, God had foretold what would happen to Old Covenant Israel. In our introductory chapter, we discussed Deuteronomy 32 where Moses, just before Israel went into the land of Canaan at the very beginning of the nation, God revealed to Moses what the end of Old Covenant Israel was going to be.

The Background of Revelation 10 in Daniel 7

We now want to discuss some prophecies in Daniel that are unique to his book and Revelation, because Daniel was writing about the events happening to the Lord's church in the first century from 500 years before they occurred, and John is writing about them from right in the middle of their fulfillment, yet they're talking about exactly the same events.

In 605 BC, Daniel was a young prophet taken captive to Babylon, ruled by Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which alarmed him, and when his own magicians and soothsayers couldn't reveal or interpret his dream for him, he arranged to have Daniel brought before him. God revealed the king's dream to Daniel, who went before Nebuchadnezzar, told him what he had dreamed, and gave him the interpretation. In Dan. 2.31-35:

> 31 You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome. 32 The head of that statue was made of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. 34 You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay, and crushed them. 35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed *all at the same time*, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the *wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found*. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

So Nebuchadnezzar had seen a gigantic metal statue of a man consisting of four parts—gold, silver, bronze, and iron mixed with

clay—each part of which represented an empire in succession. In v38, Daniel tells the king that he is the head of gold:

> 38...You are the head of gold. 39 And after you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you, then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth. 40 Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things, so, like iron that breaks in pieces, it will crush and break all these in pieces. 41 And in that you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but it will have in it the toughness of iron, inasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with common clay.

So, Daniel informs Nebuchadnezzar that he represents the Babylonian empire, and that he will be succeed by three other empires, which history and Daniel both identify as the Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman empires. The Roman empire is particularly interesting to us as we study Revelation because it's Rome that's ruling the world from the birth of Christ through the time period covered by Revelation. In Dan. 2.44, Daniel reveals:

> And in the days of those kings *the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed*, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.

This kingdom which will never be destroyed is the messiah's kingdom, which Daniel reveals will conflict with the Roman empire, the very conflict we're now concerned with in Revelation.

Note that in Dan. 2.34, all four parts of the metal man statue fall *at the same time*. The four empires comprising the metal man didn't cease to exist in the same year, but something about them did. During those four empires, God's Israel was subject to their human authority and power. As a matter of fact, the populations under those empires were more or less constant throughout all of them. For example, when the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon, the people under Babylon's rule then became under the rule of the Medo-Persian empire. When the Greeks conquered the known world, all those populations came under the rule of the Greeks; similarly when the Greeks empire fell, they continued under the rule of the Roman Empire.

During all those empires, God's people Israel were always under the human authority of each of them. However, before the Roman empire fell, that human authority over God's nation ceased, and God's people came under the authority of God's Messiah. This happened at the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, as we'll see shortly. Thus, the collapse of the metal man all at the same time wasn't about the destruction of the Roman empire, but the collapse of the rule of men over the covenant people of God. It transformed from earthly dominion to heavenly dominion. The Roman empire existed until 476 AD, but earthly dominion over God's Israel ceased and the Messiah's kingdom was fully established and demonstrated by the destruction of Jerusalem.

We next want to go to Daniel 7 to notice more about the coming conflict between Rome, the Jews, and the saints of Christ which we're seeing in Revelation. This prophecy covers the same four kingdoms Daniel saw in Daniel 2, but gives detail that will convince us that Daniel and John are talking about the same conflict. Daniel 7 takes place about 553 BC, and it concerns a dream of Daniel's. In Dan. 7.5-7, Daniel sees a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a fourth "terrible" beast, again representing the same four empires foretold in Daniel 2. In Dan. 7.13-14, Daniel says:

> 13 I kept looking in the night visions,
> And behold, with the clouds of heaven
> One like a Son of Man was coming,
> And He came up to the Ancient of Days
> And was presented before Him.
> 14 And to Him was given dominion,
> Glory and a kingdom,
> That all the peoples, nations, and men of every language
> Might serve Him.
> His dominion is an everlasting dominion
> Which will not pass away;
> And His kingdom is one
> Which will not be destroyed.

Daniel asks a being in his dream for the interpretation of his dream and is told:

> 17 These great beasts, which are four in number, are four kings who will arise from the earth. 18 But the

> saints of the Highest One will *receive* the kingdom and *possess* the kingdom forever, for all ages to come.'

Again, the saints of the Highest One who *receive* the kingdom will be first century Christians, as we will clearly see in both Daniel and Revelation.

In Dan. 7.21-22, Daniel is told:

> 21 I kept looking, and that horn [a particularly brash king during the time of the Roman empire—SGD] was waging war with the saints and overpowering them 22 until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints *took possession of* the kingdom.

Again, Daniel wrote concerning a conflict during the Roman empire aimed at the kingdom of the messiah, and here reveals that unless God had intervened from heaven, this conflict would have worn down and overpowered those Christians, exactly the conflict that we're seeing in Revelation.

Before leaving Daniel, the careful reader has probably already noticed that the saints in this conflict will both *receive* the kingdom and *possess* the kingdom, but at two different times. It's not until God sits for judgment that the saints *take possession* of the kingdom.

Christians began *receiving* the kingdom as early as Ac. 2 when the first gospel sermon was preached. Christ had been ruling with all authority from his ascension, and people who obeyed the gospel were in Christ's kingdom (Ac. 8.12, 14.22, 20.25, Eph. 5.5, Col. 1.13. 4.11, etc.) so that the author of Hebrews could say in Heb. 12.28, "Wherefore, *receiving* a kingdom that cannot be shaken..." Thus, Christians from Acts 2 on were receiving Christ's kingdom, but it wasn't until God intervened and proved it that the church had demonstrated its indestructibility that the saints *possessed* it. Daniel foretells that demonstration and Revelation shows it as it took place. In Dan. 7.23-27 we read:

> 23 Thus he said: The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the other kingdoms, and it will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it. 24 As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the

> previous ones and will subdue three kings. 25 And he will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for *a time, times, and half a time*. 26 But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. *27 Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.*

Again, Daniel discusses this particularly brash king and says that the saints in his time will be given into that king's hand so that he could attempt to wear them down for a time, times, and half a time. *Daniel and Revelation are the only two books in the Bible that speak of this specific time of affliction on saints, forming an unbreakable connection between the dreams of Daniel and the visions of John.* The expression time, times, and half a time is also spoken of as 3-1/2 years, 42 months, and 1260 days, all of which are used in Revelation.

In Dan. 7.28, Daniel's dream ended and left Daniel alarmed. He didn't understand a thing he had seen. As Peter said, these Old Testament prophets wondered what time or what manner of time when the things they foretold would be fulfilled. No one on earth could explain Daniel's dream until John came along and used the same language.

The things Daniel saw and foretold are part of the mystery of God in Revelation that is about to be completely fulfilled when the seventh trumpet sounds. Many times, people see all kinds of indications of Red China, Russia, the United Nations, and the European Common Market. None of those things can be found in the prophets of old, yet Daniel's foretelling what John was seeing certainly can.

Mt. 5.17-18 and Finishing the Mystery of God

In Mt. 5.17-18, Jesus said:

> 17 Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfil. 18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away,

> one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished.

In this passage, did Jesus teach that (1) none of the law or the prophets will pass away until all of them are fulfilled, or did he teach that (2) all of the law and the prophets will pass away when only some of them are fulfilled? He clearly said (1) that none of the law or the prophets would pass away until all of them were fulfilled, didn't he? Thus, Jesus taught the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount as he did to John in Rev. 10.7. There, Jesus taught that the destruction of Jerusalem would occur when the seventh trumpet sounded. If the law and the prophets taught that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed during the days of the Roman empire in vindication of the martyrs, then that destruction had to take place before one jot or tittle of the Mosaic law passed away. If there's anything in the law and the prophets that is still unfulfilled, then every jot and tittle of the Mosaic law is still in force!

In churches of Christ of the author's background, it is popularly held that *all of the Mosaic law passed at the cross*, but a moment's reflection will bring to mind many things foretold in the law that were still unfulfilled at the cross: 1) the resurrection of Christ, 2) the coming of the Holy Spirit in Ac. 2 (prophesied in Joel 2), 3) calling the Gentiles through the gospel (prophesied in Isa. 49.6), 4) doing away of daily sacrifices (foretold in Dan. 11.31, Heb. 8.13), and 5) the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, prophesied in Dan. 9.12. Thus, the law was spoken of as being in the process of "passing away" in II Cor. 3.11, written thirty years after the cross, Jewish Christians (including Paul) were still keeping it in Ac. 21.17-21 twenty-seven years after the cross. The author of Hebrews said it was still in operation and was "nigh unto vanishing away" in Heb. 8.4, 13, thirty-seven years after the cross. In truth and in practice, the Mosaic law didn't pass away until all of it was fulfilled when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed with its altars, priesthood, genealogical tables, etc., making obedience to the temple services impossible, which is true to this day.

There are three different relationships to the Mosaic law before the destruction of Jerusalem: 1) Gentiles were never under it, 2) fifty days after the cross, obedient Jews became dead to the law, Rom. 7.4, 6, 7, although the law was still in operation, and 3) after Pentecost, unknowing and disobedient Jews were still bound to live by the law until the temple was destroyed.

Another passage concerning the fulfillment of the mystery of God at the destruction of Jerusalem is Lk. 21.20-22, Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse, where Jesus said:

> 20 *But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies*, then know that her desolation is at hand. 21 Then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains; and let them that are in the midst of her depart out; and let not them that are in the country enter therein. 22 For these are days of vengeance, *that all things which are written may be fulfilled.*

Thus Jesus affirmed that all prophecies foretold in the Old Covenant were about to be fulfilled in his generation. This corresponds exactly with John's statement that the mystery of God foretold in the prophets was about to be fulfilled when the seventh trumpet sounded.

Beginning in 10.8, we have a second interlude, between the sixth and seventh trumpets, to give some more comforting pictures. We've just seen the first one in 10.1-7 with the announcement that there's going to be no more delay in avenging the martyrs under the altar, and the second one in 10.8-11 where John is told to eat the little book.

The purpose of these encouraging pictures before the judgment comes on those persecuting the saints is to assure the saints that the judgment won't splash over on them indiscriminately, that God won't lose track of the faithful in all the chaos that's coming.

10:8 And the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard it again speaking with me, and saying, Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel that standeth upon the sea and upon the earth (Gr. *ge*, land).

This angel's voice is the same one we've seen before, that sounded like the voice of a roaring lion, and whose face was like the sun. When John was instructed to approach this angel and take the little book, John didn't try to worship him or fall at his feet as one dead, etc., as he wold and did on other occasions. But it also wouldn't have occurred to John to go up, slap the angel on the back, and sass him, would it? He did as he was told.

10:9 And I went unto the angel, saying unto him that he should give me the little book. And he saith unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but in thy mouth it shall be sweet as honey.

This incident reminds us of the sweetness of the process of learning God's word, and also the bitterness of sometimes putting it into practice after digesting it. Throughout the Bible, God's promise of vindicating all his faithful martyrs is very sweet, but the fulfillment of that promise is to be something else again. As a faithful Jew himself, John is going to think the destroying of Jerusalem is particularly horrible.

Interestingly, in Ezek. 3.1-14, Ezekiel was given this instruction to eat God's word where he would find it sweet, then preach it to the rebellious Israelites in Babylonian captivity. Ezekiel's preaching was bitter for him because his audience was hard-hearted and stiffnecked, and in v14, Ezekiel said he went in bitterness. In Jer. 15.16-17, Jeremiah has the same instruction and experience.

Something those of us who enjoy learning God's word and teaching it need to understand is that the learning experience is very enjoyable, but it often includes struggling through difficult passages perhaps with a companion, and solving the difficulties. As a reader of this book, you probably know that already. If someone doesn't know that experience, we feel for them. However, teaching God's word is also very rewarding, but sometimes those you teach are going to be angry and ferocious with you, not standing with you or for what you teach. They did the same thing with Jesus, and you're not greater than your Lord.

10:10 And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and when I had eaten it, my belly was made bitter.

10:11 And they say unto me, Thou must prophesy again over many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.

Thus, John is told that he's going to prophesy again. He's been telling the story of martyr vindication in chapters 1-11 of Revelation from earth's point of view: persecution, martyrdom, and tribulation on God's saints. In chapters 12-20, he'll be telling it again from heaven's point of view, that the conflict between Jerusalem and the saints is just one battle in a long conflict that's always taken place between Christ and Satan.

Chapter 11

The Seventh Trumpet, Final Woe

In Revelation 9, we ended with the sixth trumpet, and chapter 10 announced that when the seventh trumpet sounded, the mystery of God as taught by the prophets would be finished. It gave encouragement to the saints that they would be safe during the upcoming judgment on Jerusalem. We now proceed to complete the seventh trumpet.

11:1 And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and one said, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.

To this point Daniel had foretold that during the days of the Roman empire, the saints of God would be persecuted, but that judgment would be rendered against their persecutors on behalf of the saints. As we saw in the introduction, Moses, Isaiah, and other prophets including John the Baptist had foretold the destruction of Old Covenant Israel. Jesus had many times spoken of vengeance coming speedily in his generation on Jerusalem, and his apostles had as well. When the seventh trumpet sounds, there will be no more delay. The revelations of judgment have been given, the warnings have been given, and it remains but to measure Jerusalem's temple for destruction, and then execute the judgment.

John is given the task of measuring the temple, not the Vatican, as many think the harlot judged in Revelation is Roman Catholicism. The author doesn't adhere to Roman Catholicism, but he doesn't read it into these verses, either. That this is the physical temple in Jerusalem and not a spiritual temple which Jesus was already building and Christians were its stones is evident from vv2-3. John also measures the people worshipping in that temple, so they're not people that used to worship in the physical thirty years before, if Revelation was written in the 90s. This temple is in the city which is under tribulation from the

Gentiles for 42 months, 1260 days, time, times and half a time, and 3-1/2 years, the exact time of the Roman siege of Jerusalem, from April 67 to August 70 AD.

John's measuring the temple for its fitness for destruction is like Amos's vision in Amos 7.7-8. God was about to destroy the northern kingdom of Israel for her idolatry, and Amos sees something like what John sees:

> 7 Thus He showed me, and behold, the Lord was standing by a vertical wall, with a plumb line in His hand. 8 And the LORD said to me, What do you see, Amos? And I said, A plumb line. Then the Lord said,
>
> Behold I am about to put a plumb line
> In the midst of My people Israel.
> I will spare them no longer.
> 9 The high places of Isaac will be desolated
> And the sanctuaries of Israel laid waste.

As Amos held his measuring instrument, a plumb line up against a wall that represented Israel, he could see that the wall was so off-vertical that it was about to fall. As John measures the temple in his vision, he sees the same thing. The temple is about to fall. Both prophets were measuring to show the propriety of judgment.

John is also told to measure the people inside the temple, probably to note or mark those who were faithful to God so they wouldn't be indiscriminately punished in the coming destruction.

11:2 And the court which is without the temple leave without, and measure it not; for it hath been given unto the nations: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

The courts outside the temple weren't to be measured, for they would be destroyed imminently by the Gentile armies of Rome. As we've seen, Daniel 7 foretold the 42 month tribulation on Jerusalem before God used the Roman armies to tread on his holy city, which had become a harlot. Jesus used this same language in Lk. 21.20-24:

> 20 But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand. 21 Then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains; and let them that are in the midst of her depart out; and let not them that are in the country enter therein. 22 *For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are*

> *written may be fulfilled.* 23 Woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! for there shall be great distress upon the land, and wrath unto this people. 24 And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led captive into all the nations: *and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.*

Only two cities in the Bible are called "the holy city," Jerusalem and New Jerusalem. Neither Rome nor the Vatican was ever referred to in that way.

The *time element* for the Gentiles to trod down Jerusalem is stated several different ways:

11.2	the holy city is trodden under foot *42 months*
11.3	the time two witnesses prophesy in the holy city *1260 days*
12.6	the woman flees into the wilderness protected by God *1260 days*
12.14	the woman stays in the wilderness *3-1/2 years*
13.4	the beast out of the sea is given authority *42 months*

All of these events are taking place simultaneously, even though they describe different people, different situations, and different locations. The two witnesses are prophesying at the same time the city is trodden under foot, which is while the woman flees into the wilderness and stays, and all these things are taking place while the sea beast, which we'll see is the Roman Empire, is trampling Jerusalem under foot. This is same period of persecution we saw in Dan. 7.25-27, to which Jesus referred as "the great tribulation" in Mt. 24.21, when he foretold the activities leading up to the destruction of the temple and Old Covenant Jerusalem.

11:3 And I will give unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

These two witnesses are prophets, prophesying in dire times, as evidenced by their mourning clothes made of sackcloth. They are symbolic prophets, as we'll see in the next few verses.

11:4 These are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks, standing before the Lord of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land).

We would have no idea of the significance of these two prophets being called olive trees and candlesticks, were it not for a similar vision in Zech. 4.1-8. Zechariah prophesied in Israel after the Babylonian captivity when the Jews were rebuilding the temple, destroyed in 586 BC by Nebuchadnezzar. To impress upon Zechariah God's zeal for rebuilding the temple, he gives him this vision:

> 4:1 Then the angel who was speaking with me returned, and roused me as a man who is awakened from his sleep. 2 And he said to me, What do you see? And I said, I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it; 3 also two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left side.

We're not nearly as impressed with this vision as Zechariah would have been. All our lives, we've been accustomed to turning the lights on with electrical switches. In Zechariah's time, that had never been done. He sees lampstands, with bowls for olive oil fed automatically from olive trees right into the bowls. Self-fueling lamps! No more planting and raising olive trees, harvesting the olives, pressing out the oil, and keeping the oil bowls full on the lampstands! So, Zechariah asked the angel what these lampstands represented, and he's told:

> 4 Then I answered and said to the angel who was speaking with me saying, What are these, my lord? 5 So the angel who was speaking with me answered and said to me, Do you not know what these are? And I said, No, my lord. 6 Then he answered and said to me, This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, *Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,* says the LORD of hosts.

Thus, God told Zechariah that these two lampstands (which John's two prophets also were) were indications that rebuilding the temple was going to be done not by human power, but by God's power and his Spirit. Thus, the two prophets John saw represented the same thing: these prophets, who were about to be martyred, were going to be protected by God's power and Spirit. Just as certainly as God's temple was to be rebuilt by God's power in Zechariah's time, God's saints in John's time were going to be victorious over their enemies by God's

power. Their well-being wasn't going to be dependent on any man or any nation.

11:5 And if any man desireth to hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth and devoureth their enemies; and if any man shall desire to hurt them, in this manner must he be killed.

That these prophets are symbolic or representative is seen in the next verse.

11:6 These have the power to shut the heaven, that it rain not during the days of their prophecy: and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **with every plague, as often as they shall desire.**

The witness that has the power to stop rainfall reminds us of course of Elijah who prayed for rain to stop in his time. The witness that had power over water to turn them into blood reminds us of Moses and one of the plagues when Israel escaped from Egypt. These two witnesses are representative of Moses and the prophets who foretold the persecution of the saints in the first century, and whose prophecies (the mystery of 10.7) were about to be fulfilled when the seventh trumpet sounded.

11:7 And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that cometh up out of the abyss shall make war with them, and overcome them, and kill them.

The beast coming out of this pit will be identified in chapter 13, and we'll wait until then to discuss it. From Daniel 2 and 7 we can guess here that it's Judaism under Rome, as it is killing God's prophets in God's own city. These prophets are now martyrs. When Jesus said concerning his martyrs in Mt. 23.34-36:

> 34 Therefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: some of them shall ye kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city: 35 that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous unto the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar. 36 Verily I say unto you, *All these things shall come upon this generation.*

If Jesus was telling the truth (and if he wasn't, he deserved the death penalty as a false prophet), the mystery foretold by Moses and the prophets was about to be fulfilled in the destruction of God's holy city in his generation. During the Roman siege of Jerusalem, it had been nearly forty years since Jesus had made that promise. His generation was about up!

11:8 And their dead bodies lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.

The great city of Revelation is now identified. It's God's holy city, where his temple is, and it's called spiritually, not literally, Sodom and Egypt, and it's where the Lord of these two prophets was crucified! Can you get the consent of your mind to say Rome? If you know where Jesus was crucified and where God's temple was, you know the name of it, and the identity of the harlot. If you don't know that, you shouldn't be reading this book.

Why do you suppose Jerusalem is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt? Neither Rome nor Babylon in Iraq ever were. Sodom was a harlot of perversity and Egypt was a harlot of bondage. Jerusalem had become both. In Isa. 1.9-10, God called Jerusalem Sodom eight centuries before Christ called her that:

> 9 Except Jehovah of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, we should have been like unto Gomorrah. 10 Hear the word of Jehovah, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

These dead bodies lying in the street of Jerusalem are probably a reference to the fact that during the Roman siege, bodies of her inhabitants piled up both outside and inside the city by the tens of thousands, some no doubt belonging to saints trapped therein. Josephus attests to this fact (*Wars* 4, 5, 2; 4, 6, 3).

11:9 And from among the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations do men look upon their dead bodies three days and a half, and suffer not their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb.

The peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations apparently are Gentiles who have no respect for these prophets, not even granting them a decent burial, so they just let them lie in the streets of the holy city, while we see the reaction of the inhabitants of the land of Israel:

11:10 And they that dwell on the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **rejoice over them, and make merry; and they shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwell on the earth** (Gr. *ge*, land).

By and large, these rebellious Jews rejoice over the death of these martyred prophets, They've been tormented by their preaching, as they were tormented by the teaching of Jesus and his apostles, and they're thrilled that they don't have to listen to it anymore. They send gifts to each other in admiration of their mutual skills at oppressing these faithful saints.

We've already seen from 6.9-10 how God views the death of his saints, so we can probably guess that God's not going to leave the bodies of these two faithful saints laying in the street.

11:11 And after the three days and a half the breath of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them that beheld them.

God takes them to heaven as he had the other faithful martyrs! This is symbolizing the resurrection of the law and the prophets. Their predictions will not fail, including the judicial sentence about to be carried out on Jerusalem.

11:12 And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they went up into heaven in the cloud; and their enemies beheld them.

Apparently, the Lord really does know those who are his, doesn't he? He took these martyrs to heaven, where the other martyrs are, as we saw in 6.9-10.

11:13 And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell; and there were killed in the earthquake seven thousand persons: and the rest were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.

God also reacts to the death of these saints by sending partial judgments on the city. A tenth of it is destroyed, not a complete destruction yet, to give the ungodly inhabitants further time to repent. Josephus testifies that 10,000 souls perished in this earthquake, while John says 7,000. Both may be right, with Josephus being literally true, and John using a number that represented a large complete symbolic number.

11:14 The second Woe is past: behold, the third Woe cometh quickly.

The third woe will take place when the seventh angel sounds the last trumpet. This is when the mystery of God is finished (10.7), and the city is destroyed.

11:15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there followed great voices in heaven, and they said, The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever.

Now the celebration has taken a different turn. It's God's faithful in heaven who are rejoicing, not the enemies of the saints in Jerusalem. God's rule has been demonstrated over the world, and Christ really is the ruler of the kings of the earth. God has intervened, judgment has been rendered in favor of the saints of the most high, and the saints have now not only received the kingdom, but they now possess it. In Lk. 21.31, Jesus had said, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem:

> Even so ye also, when ye see these things coming to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh.

The mystery of God has been fulfilled, the judgment on Jerusalem has taken place, and those seeing "these things" know that God's rule was present.

11:16 And the four and twenty elders, who sit before God on their thrones, fell upon their faces and worshipped God,

Many times, some think that God's judgments are too harsh. These heavenly inhabitants obviously didn't think so.

11:17 saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast; because thou hast taken thy great power, and didst reign.

11:18 And the nations were wroth, and thy wrath came, and the time of the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear thy name, the small and the great; and to destroy them that destroy the earth (Gr. *ge*, land).

Notice that one event, the destruction of Jerusalem, was viewed in two ways: 1) the wrath of God, as viewed by the unrighteous, and 2) the reward of God, as viewed by the righteous. This is exactly how

Moses foretold this event in Deuteronomy 32. As we saw in the introductory chapter to this book, Moses, at the beginning of the nation, foretold it's end (v20). He said it would be a "perverse and crooked generation" (v5, cf Ac. 2.40), that "their vine is from the vine of Sodom" (v32), and that in one event, God would "vindicate his people" (v36), while at the same time he would "render vengeance on My adversaries" (v41). In verse 42, Moses said:

> Rejoice, O nations, with His people;
> For He will *avenge* the blood of His servants,
> And will render *vengeance* on His adversaries,
> And will atone for His land and His people.

Thus Moses and John teach the same thing about the destruction of Jerusalem: the same event was *vengeance* on his adversaries and *vindication* of the righteous martyrs; it was punishment for the one, and salvation for the other. The Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 was taught to the Jews and they sang it annually to remind them of their future until Jerusalem was destroyed. They knew what was coming.

11:19 And there was opened the temple of God that is in heaven; and there was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant; and there followed lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake, and great hail.

It's interesting that in God's temple in heaven, the ark of his covenant was in place. Old Covenant Israel lost possession of the ark of the Mosaic covenant during the Babylon captivity. In God's temple at this point, the ark of his covenant, evidently the new covenant, is in his temple. Incidentally, it's in this heavenly temple that Jesus works as our High Priest, as is taught in Heb. 8.1-2:

> 1 Now in the things which we are saying the chief point is this: We have such a high priest, who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty *in the heavens, 2 a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle*, which the Lord pitched, not man.

Lightnings, voices, thunders, an earthquake, and great hail portend great power that God has and will exercised to judge Jerusalem.

We're at the halfway point through Revelation. If the book ended at this point, we'd know that God would intervene on the saints' behalf, and with his help, they could overcome all their enemies. However, we wouldn't know the outcome of Satan, his two beasts, or the har-

lot. In the second half of the book, we'll see this same conflict from heaven's point of view, where the present clash between saints and religious persecution will be seen as just one clash between two much greater adversaries: Satan and Jesus Christ.

Chapter 12

The Underlying Conflict

As we begin the second half of Revelation, we're going to be dealing with the same conflict that first-century Christians were enduring, suffering persecution even to the point of martyrdom. However, John will be dealing with the conflict from a different vantage point, that of one skirmish in a much larger battle, one that has always existed between Christ and Satan. Since Jesus has already overcome Satan, he's in the position to instruct Christians how they can overcome Satan themselves— that is, in the same way that Christ successfully did it.

Since America has recently been involved in several wars in the Middle East, if we were to talk to some veterans of those conflicts, they would describe their experiences in terms of tactics, equipment, particular battles, casualties, mistakes they witnessed, wounds they suffered, etc. However, if we were to talk to Donald Rumsfeld, or Dick Cheney, both Secretaries of Defense during those times, or Colin Powell, the Secretary of State, they would each offer an entirely different view of the Middle East wars. They would describe it as part of a much larger conflict between geopolitical powers, Communist governments vs. capitalist ones, oil-producing vs. energy-consuming nations, Arabs vs. Jews, etc.

We'll notice a similar difference now in Revelation, as John shifts his point of view from a tactical situation involving Christians in chapters 1-11, to a much broader strategic view of much larger actors in the heavenly or spiritual realm.

We start by seeing Satan and Christ as the major actors.

12:1 And a great sign was seen in heaven: a woman arrayed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars;

The first character we see is a glorious woman. She's not a literal woman, but a sign, a symbol. She's arrayed with the brightness of the sun, standing on the moon; she's a royal lady wearing a starry crown. She's pregnant, travailing in pain in the birth process.

12:2 and she was with child; and she crieth out, travailing in birth, and in pain to be delivered.

We'll see shortly that the child she's giving birth to is the messiah, so we naturally think the woman is Mary, the biological mother of Jesus. However, we should consider another possibility that Jews and Jewish Christians were thoroughly familiar with. In Micah 4.9-10, Micah foretells Judah's going into Babylonian captivity as the travail of childbirth:

> 9 Now, why do you cry out loudly?
> Is there no king among you,
> Or has your counselor perished,
> That agony has gripped you like a woman in childbirth?
> 10 Writhe and labor to give birth,
> Daughter of Zion,
> Like a woman in childbirth,
> For now you will go out of the city,
> Dwell in the field,
> And go to Babylon.
> There you will be rescued;
> There the LORD will redeem you
> From the hand of your enemies.

Micah pictures Judah as a mother in childbirth by going to Babylon, whom God will rescue. In Micah 5.2, Micah reveals that after the captivity, the Jews returning from Babylon will give birth to the messiah at Bethlehem:

> 2 But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
> Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
> From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
> His goings forth are from long ago,
> From the days of eternity.
> 3 Therefore, He will give them up until the time
> When she who is in labor has borne a child.

Then the remainder of His brethren
Will return to the sons of Israel.
4 And He will arise and shepherd His flock
In the strength of the LORD,
In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God.
And they will remain,
Because at that time He will be great
To the ends of the earth.
5 And this One will be our peace.

This prophecy is quoted in Mt. 2.6 and applied to the birth of Jesus, with the understanding of the Jewish leaders that it foretold that the messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea. Of course, Jesus would be a ruler in Israel, his existence was from long ago, he would be great to the ends of the earth, and he would bring peace to the faithful of Old Covenant Israel. In Micah, then, the messiah was brought forth by the faithful of Judah who would return from the captivity. In Mt. 10.34, Jesus said he came *not* to bring peace *but* a sword. This not...but construction modifying a common verb (to come) is a form of ellipsis, that is, words are left out that are to be supplied by the reader. In this case, the words to be supplied are "only" and "also," with emphasis on the latter term. In other words, Jesus was saying, "I came *not only* to bring peace, *but also and mainly* a sword." For more information on ellipsis, please see Chapter 17, "Speaking Where the Bible Is Silent," in the author's *How to Study the Bible: A Practical Guide to Independent Bible Study*, available at Amazon.com.

Of course, Mary was the biological mother of Jesus, but she was a citizen in the faithful remnant of Judah, which was foretold to be the mother of the messiah.

12:3 And there was seen another sign in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his heads seven diadems.

The next actor in this vision is a great red dragon, not real, but a sign of Satan (v9) who is real. His seven heads imply his intelligence, his ten horns signifying his great power. His royal crowns indicate his rule over all who bow to his authority. In 17.12, we'll see this dragon again, and the ten horns will be identified as ten vassal kings, serving under the beast that arose from the sea in the next chapter.

12:4 And his tail draweth the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**: and the dragon standeth**

before the woman that is about to be delivered, that when she is delivered he may devour her child.

Satan doesn't have a tail that large in reality (if he has one at all), but the picture implies sweeping power and an extravagant sphere of influence. He tries to destroy the messiah at birth, reminding us of Herod's attempt to kill Jesus at birth in Mt. 2.16 by killing all the infants under two years of age in Bethlehem.

12:5 And she was delivered of a son, a man child, who is [lit., "about to"] **to rule all the nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and unto his throne.**

Failing to stop Jesus' birth and infancy, the messiah withstood Satan's attempts to get him to sin in Matthew 4, which would have disqualified him as the pure lamb who could take away the sin of the world. His rule of the nations with a rod of iron is a fulfillment of the messianic psalm, Ps. 2.7-9:

> 7 I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:
> He said to Me, Thou art My Son,
> Today I have begotten Thee.
> 8 Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as
> Thine inheritance,
> And the very ends of the earth as Thy possession.
> 9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron,

This same psalm is quoted by Paul in Ac. 13.33 where he applies it to the resurrection of Jesus, when he began to reign on his throne.

This rod of iron is another nation, for God uses nations as tools. In Isa. 10.5-7, God said of Assyria, that he was presently bringing her to invade Israel for punishment:

> 5 Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger
> And the staff in whose hands is My indignation,
> 6 I send it against a godless nation
> And commission it against the people of My fury
> To capture booty and to seize plunder,
> And to trample them down like mud in the streets.
> 7 Yet it does not so intend
> Nor does it plan so in its heart,
> But rather it is its purpose to destroy,
> And to cut off many nations.

Thus God viewed Assyria as his rod and the godless nation was Israel, yet Assyria didn't intend to punish God's people for their ungodliness. They were just doing it for the plunder. God used a world empire as a paddle! Jesus, as king of kings and Lord of Lords, has that power now, and he's using it with Rome against the land of Israel in Jesus' generation.

Thus the emperor of the Roman empire was at best only second in command, wasn't he? Our president is at best second in command. Jesus is his ruler, whether he believes in Christ or not. Putin is not the ultimate ruler of Russia: Christ is.

12:6 And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that there they may nourish her a thousand two hundred and threescore days.

After the ascension, this woman who had been the faithful of Judah then became the church. The time frame of Revelation is concerned with Christ's coming to destroy Jerusalem to avenge the blood of all the martyrs as he had promised (Mt. 23.29-36). In the latter half of the 60s AD, those faithful to Christ fled into the wilderness as Jesus had warned them to in Lk. 21.20-22:

> 20 But when ye see *Jerusalem compassed with armies*, then know that her desolation is at hand. 21 *Then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains;* and let them that are in the midst of her depart out; and let not them that are in the country enter therein. 22 For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

The church fleeing to the mountains is doing exactly what Jesus told his followers to do in Mt. 24.16 and Lk. 21.15-16. God's people receiving protection from Him is a recurring theme in the Bible. When God called Moses, he fled into the wilderness where God protected him for forty years. At the Exodus, Israel fled into the wilderness of Sinai, while God provided everything they needed. In I Kings 18, Elijah fled into the wilderness from Ahab and Jezebel, while God provided for him. Joseph and Mary had fled into the wilderness when Herod was after the baby Jesus. When Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem, God's saints fled into the wilderness of Perea, God again providing and protecting them.

Jesus' instruction for faithful saints to flee Jerusalem was part of God's protection of his saints. Historians tell us that they fled to Pella

in the region of Perea (lit., the country beyond), which was part of Herod's rule east of the Jordan river valley.

Josephus (*Wars 3*, 3, 3) tells us that the first time Jerusalem had been encompassed with armies after Jesus gave his warning to escape was at the hand of a Roman general named Cestius Gallius in late 66 AD, and that after besieging the city for about a week, he withdrew unexpectedly, giving those faithful to Christ an opportunity to escape. Thus, between the opportunity to escape, Jesus' warning to flee, and the available refuge in Perea, God certainly did provide protection for the saints. Furthermore, they were to remain there for the 1260 day, 42 month, 3-1/2 year period of time of the war in Jerusalem. In Dan. 12.1, Daniel had prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem at this very time:

> 1 Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of *distress such as never occurred* since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, *everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.*

Michael was a defender of God's people during their unique distress. In Jude 9, Michael was the archangel who disputed with Satan over the body of Moses. When Daniel asked the time the terrible distress would occur, he was told in Dan. 12.5-7:

> 5 Then I, Daniel, looked and behold, two others were standing, one on this bank of the river, and the other on that bank of the river. 6 And one said to the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, How *long will it be* until the end of these wonders? 7 And I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, as he raised his right hand and his left toward heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that *it would be for a time, times, and half a time; and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people*, all these events will be completed.

Again, Daniel told how long the war would last (five centuries before it happened!), just as John said, months before it happened. The end result was that the power of the holy people would be completely shattered. Their temple would be gone, so too the priesthood, the sys-

tem of sacrifices, and the practice of the Mosaic Law, all of which are absent to this day.

History says that during the siege, 1.1 million Jews perished. At any one time, tens of thousands of dead bodies were stacked everywhere within the city. The starving fed off the putrified flesh, and mothers ate the flesh of their own babies. Those who listened to Jesus and fled at the opportunity truly had been protected and rescued by God.

12:7 And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels going forth to war with the dragon; and the dragon warred and his angels;

In Eph. 6.12, Paul speaks of this kind of warfare:

> For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Michael and Gabriel are the only two angels named in scripture. John describes conflict between Michael and his angels warring against Satan and his.

12:8 And they prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven.

Satan and his angels didn't win the battle, and they lost their sphere of influence in the spiritual or heavenly realm.

12:9 And the great dragon was cast down, the old serpent, he that is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world; he was cast down to the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**, and his angels were cast down with him.**

Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, was then cast down to the land of Israel where the conflict between Christians and their Jewish persecutors was centered.

12:10 And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying, Now is come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accuseth them before our God day and night.

This great heavenly voice announces that Christ won the battle in the spiritual realm. Satan lost the battle when Jesus was born, he lost it

at the temptation of Jesus, he lost it when he tried to destroy the church at Jerusalem, and, having failed at all those attempts, he's now in the land of Israel (v9) accusing saints and trying to pick them off one at a time.

The term satan means an adversary. Americans get incensed when the mullahs of Iran say that Israel is a small satan and, since we support Israel, that the United States is a big satan. The Iranians aren't saying we're the Satan of the garden of Eden; they're simply saying that we're an adversary of theirs. The term devil means "accuser," literally, "a caster-through;" he throws things through, like a mirror, to destroy its image. That's what an accuser does—tears up the reputation of his victim. This is the word Paul used in I Tim. 3.11 when he says that women must not be *slanderers*. Satan slandered Job in 2.9-10 when he said that Job only served God in return for a present physical reward, i.e., that he served God for hire; God had bought him off. He accused Job, and now he's accusing faithful saints in the first century.

12:11 And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even unto death.

These first century saints knew how to personally overcome Satan. They knew it was possible. This is a most important verse in Revelation, for it tells exactly how they did it. We've been seeing these overcomers all through the book. The Greek word is *nike* (yes, that's the brand of an athletic shoe), which means conqueror, victor, or overcomer. Jesus overcame Satan while he was on earth. This verse describes how Christians overcame him: 1) by Christ's blood, 2) by the word of their testimony, their holding fast to Jesus and his teaching, and 3) being loyal to Christ even unto death, that is, even if it cost them their life. The person who did those three things was untouchable by Satan. In Rev. 3.21, Jesus said that those saints overcame the same way he did. Again, the word testimony comes from *marturo*, the root of our English word martyr: a martyr is one who holds to his testimony even if it costs him his life. Note that Christians weren't just survivors, they were overcomers, conquerors.

12:12 Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe for the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **and for the sea: because the devil is gone down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time.**

Those in heaven ("our citizenship is in heaven," Phil. 3.20) rejoice at Satan's defeat in the spiritual realm, but are concerned about those

in the land of Israel (the earth dwellers, vs. the heaven dwellers) and the sea (probably surrounding nations or societies) because he's going to pursue saints in the short time available to him.

In Rev. 6.9-11, when the martyrs underneath God's altar asked how long it would be before they were avenged, they were told to wait for a little time. This was the length of time Satan had left to use the Jews to try to finish off the saints before Jerusalem was destroyed.

Thus, the short time is the duration of the war in Jerusalem. At the conclusion of the time, times and half a time, 42 months, 1260 days, or 3-1/2 years, we'll see his fate in chapter 20, when he's cast into the lake of fire.

12:13 And when the dragon saw that he was cast down to the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**, he persecuted the woman that brought forth the man child.**

This woman, who, before Christ was born, was the faithful of Old Covenant Israel, is now the church, not just Mary, and we now see how God protected her against Satan.

12:14 And there were given to the woman the two wings of the great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness unto her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.

We've already commented on Jesus providing protection for his saints during the siege of Jerusalem by instructing them to flee to the mountains when Jerusalem was encompassed by armies. Symbolically, John pictures it as the Christians escaping Jerusalem by the wings of a great eagle. God delivering his people on eagle's wings is a beautiful theme of the Bible. In Ex. 19.4, God said he brought Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness on eagle's wings. They walked every step, yet God directed it all. In Dt. 32.9-11, we see this theme again:

> 9 For the Lord's portion is His people;
> Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance.
> 10 He found him in a desert land,
> And in the howling waste of a wilderness;
> He encircled him, He cared for him,
> He guarded him as the pupil of His eye.
> 11 Like an eagle that stirs up its nest,
> That hovers over its young,
> He spread His wings and caught them,
> He carried them on His pinions.

In addition to God's caring for Israel like an eagle caring for its young and carrying them on eagle's wings, notice that he also said he guarded him as the pupil of his eye. The word translated "pupil" is "little man." What is the little man of someone's eye? When you look at the pupil of someone's eye, don't you see a little man in there, your own reflection? Now, how well do you protect the pupil of your eye? If I throw a rock at you, or wave a stick around your head, isn't your primary concern your eyes? That's the picture of God's protection of his people, like we protect our own eyes. Does God care for these persecuted Christians? Is He going to let them get caught in the shuffle of a chaotic judgment on their persecutors? Not a chance, is there?

In Isa. 40.29-31, Isaiah illustrates how God protects and provides for his people:

> 29 He giveth power to the faint; and to him that hath no might he increaseth strength. 30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: 31 but they that wait for Jehovah shall renew their strength; *they shall mount up with wings as eagles*; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.

This is exactly the encouragement the saints slandered and persecuted by Satan needed.

12:15 And the serpent cast out of his mouth after the woman water as a river, that he might cause her to be carried away by the stream.

Next, Satan blasts a river of water at the saints, trying to wash her away in a flood. In Isa. 8.5, God described the invasion of Israel by Assyria in just this language:

> 7 now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them *the waters of the River, strong and many*, even the king of Assyria and all his glory: and it shall come up over all its channels, and go over all its banks; 8 and it shall sweep onward into Judah; it shall overflow and pass through; it shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of its wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.

When Israel wouldn't repent and trust in God in the 8th century BC, God brought the Assyrians as a flood to invade Israel and conquer

it. In Revelation, John uses that same language to show what the Romans are going to do to Jerusalem for her unfaithfulness.

In Jer. 47.2, Jeremiah foretold the doom of the Philistines in his time in this same language:

> Behold, waters are going to rise from the north
> And become an overflowing torrent,
> And overflow the land and all its fulness,
> The city and those who live in it;
> And the men will cry out,
> And every inhabitant of the land will wail.

In Dan. 9.26, speaking of the desolations coming on Jerusalem and its temple, Daniel used this same language of judgment:

> Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.

Notice these passages in Psalms where billowing waves and waters of a flood are pictured as trials and tribulations of his people again and again: Ps. 124.4, 42.7, 18.4, and 32.10.

12:16 And the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **helped the woman, and the earth** (Gr. *ge*, land) **opened her mouth and swallowed up the river which the dragon cast out of his mouth.**

The land helped the woman by providing an escape and sustaining her in Perea during the war in Jerusalem.

12:17 And the dragon waxed wroth with the woman, and went away to make war with the rest of her seed, that keep the commandments of God, and hold the testimony of Jesus:

Having failed at stopping Christ at his birth using Herod, at his temptation, at his death by the resurrection, and at pursuing the church, Satan now resolves to try to pick off individual Christians. The book of Hebrews, written during the same period of time as Revelation, was written to Jewish Christians who were tempted to give in because of the Jewish persecution. Satan was still trying to pick them off.

Chapter 13

Emergence of the Dragon's Helpers

After being introduced to Satan in the previous chapter, we are now introduced to two of his helpers—two beasts—in his war against the saints. One beast arises out of the sea, and the other out of the land who derives his authority from the sea beast. In later chapters of Revelation, the land beast is many times called a false prophet, thus a beast of a religious nature. Since the theme of Revelation is God's vengeance on Jerusalem and Judaism for her persecuting the prophets, apostles of Jesus, and his saints, this religious beast is undoubtedly Jerusalem and Judaism. The act of judgment on the land beast is seen by the martyrs as their vindication.

13:1 And he [the dragon, 12.17—SGD] **stood upon the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns, and seven heads, and on his horns ten diadems, and upon his heads names of blasphemy.**

Since the second beast arises out of the land, the land of Israel, the beast that arises out of the sea likely symbolizes the Gentile world, particularly Rome, as we'll see shortly. This beast is very similar, in fact a composite, of one we saw in our study of Daniel 2 and 7, and it was the Roman empire there. Further, in Dan. 9.26, Daniel revealed that after the messiah had come and been cut off in his crucifixion the Romans would invade the land of Israel, stop the sacrifices in the temple, and destroy Jerusalem:

> 26 And after the threescore and two weeks shall the anointed one be cut off, and shall have nothing: and *the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary*; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and even unto the end shall be war; deso-

> lations are determined. 27 And he shall make a firm covenant with many for one week: and *in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease*; and upon the wing of abominations shall come one that maketh desolate; and *even unto the full end, and that determined, shall wrath be poured out upon the desolate*. (ASV)

Comparing this beast with the one in Daniel 7, we see that both of them had seven heads (probably seven emperors) and ten horns (later, we'll see these are ten vassal kings under Rome). Both of them were to persecute the saints for a 3-1/2 year period of time. Both had the same animals empowering them. Both had mouths of blasphemy against God and the people of God. Both were overcoming the saints temporarily, and both were defeated in their aims by the intervention of God. There's not another place in scripture to see this dramatic degree of similarity.

In Dan. 11.41, Daniel said that the Romans would enter the Beautiful Land, Israel's land, and in v45, he would "pitch the tents of his royal pavilion between the seas and the beautiful Holy Mountain. As we've already seen in Dan. 12.1, Rome would bring a *time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time*. In vv6-7, when Daniel asked when these things would happen, he was told that it would be for a *time, times, and half a time*; and *as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be* completed, i.e., when Rome completely destroyed Jerusalem.

Daniel is then told to seal up these words until the time of the end, the end of the Mosaic age (since the age of Christ has no end, Isa. 9.6-7, Lk. 1.33) for the time of their fulfillment is a long time off, but John in Revelation, speaking of the same events about to be fulfilled, was told not to seal them up, for the time was at hand (Rev. 22.10).

13:2 And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his throne, and great authority.

So this beast, Rome, got its power from Satan.

13:3 And I saw one of his heads as though it had been smitten unto death; and his death-stroke was healed: and the whole earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **wondered after the beast;**

One of Rome's heads, one of its Caesars, received a mortal blow. One view of this event is that this represents Julius Caesar, who was the first Caesar of the Roman republic from 49-44 BC. He favored an empire rather than a republic, and was assassinated on the Senate floor by Mark Anthony, and the republican form of government was restored. This certainly was a crisis in Rome. Another event which fits the time element of Revelation much better is Nero's suicide in 68 AD. Nero had come to power in 54 AD. Whether or not he was the beast John describes, he certainly was a beast personally. Having come to power at the age of sixteen, he had killed many members of his own family, including his pregnant wife whom he kicked to death. A homosexual, he raped both male and female prisoners. He burned Christians alive to illuminate his garden parties. He had burned Rome in July of 64 AD, attempted to place the blame at the feet of Christians in Rome, and began persecuting Christians there.

During this time, he sent his general Vespasian into Palestine to quell Jewish riots there. When Nero took his own life, there followed three Roman emperors in one year: Otho, Galba, and Vitellius. Vespasian, in Judea, rushed back to Rome to take the reins of government and left his son Titus to finish the Jewish war.

Can you imagine how we would feel in the United States if we had four presidents in the course of one year? Everything would seem pretty unstable, wouldn't it? We would all wonder if the nation was going to survive. Roman citizens felt the same way, but when Vespasian finally restored stability, all the known world was impressed, and the whole land of Palestine wondered after Rome's ability to survive.

13:4 and they worshipped the dragon, because he gave his authority unto the beast; and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? And who is able to war with him?

The whole land of Israel worshiped Rome, and in so doing, they worshiped Satan, who controlled the beast. Josephus tells of King Agrippa of Israel reflecting on the impressive power of Rome in attempting to persuade the Jews to not go to war with the Romans:

> Will you not carefully reflect upon the Roman Empire? Will you not estimate your own weakness: Hath not your army been often beaten even by your neighboring nations, while the power of the Romans is invincible in all parts of the habitable earth? (*Wars,* 2, 16, 4)

13:5 and there was given to him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and there was given to him authority to continue forty and two months.

Rome was "given" authority from God who controlled all these events, to besiege the land of Israel for the now familiar 3-1/2 years. This was the length of the Jewish war from Vespasian's mission to subdue the land in the spring of 67 AD, until his son Titus finally destroyed the temple and city in the summer of 70 AD.

13:6 And he opened his mouth for blasphemies against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, even them that dwell in the heaven.

Rome blasphemed God by taking divine prerogatives to herself in the form of Caesar worship, placing her emblems in temples across the empire, by blaspheming the name of God, and even God's tabernacle in heaven, including the saints that dwell in heaven. Notice the contrast between those who dwell on the land, the unregenerate Jews, and those who dwell in heaven. This would include Christians still on the earth, but whose citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3.20). The Romans also took on divine prerogatives by putting a stop to the temple sacrifices.

Sadly, Foy E. Wallace, Jr. feels obligated on these verses to give one of his frequent rants on those who don't use the "divine pronouns": *Thee, Thou,* and *Thine* as though that constitutes blasphemy of God's name similar to what John speaks of here. When I first wrote this chapter, I commented on his rant, then thought better of it and took it out. However, when I got to chapter 15, he did it again, so I decided it needed to be addressed, even though it's not really commenting on Revelation.

Do Thou, Thee, Thy, and Thine Express Reverence?

The *New International Version* is the first major English version of the Bible that doesn't use "divine pronouns" in it: thee, thou, thy, and thine. Some claim these are the pronouns of address to deity; thus, this subject is generally presented as an objection to the NIV.

How does that strike you? Long before I began preaching, I remember the shock of hearing my first gospel preacher call God "you" in prayer. You may say, "Well, I don't like that either. It sounds irreverent to me." Of course, we don't mean to call anyone's reverence into

question, but we do ask you to consider whether these pronouns actually show such.

When I started preaching, I used the American Standard Version, but the old legendary Foy Wallace took swipes at these "young preachers who don't use the King James Version and call God 'you' in prayer."

At one of my first gospel meetings, an older preacher lived there, and I was scheduled to eat dinner at his home. Another guest was an elderly Christian whom I had heard of for years and was eager to meet. When I drove up to the house, it was a beautiful spring day, and the two white-haired men were standing in the yard enjoying the blooming daffodils and the newly green grass.

As I walked up, they greeted me and resumed their conversation; it was about these young preachers who don't use the KJV and call God "you" in prayer. I was probably twenty-eight at the time. I thought I could join in the conversation, but decided to stay out of it, if I could.

Soon, one of them said, "Isn't that right, brother Dawson?"

I said, "No, I don't think that's right at all."

So the tall, dignified gentleman, whom I was anxious to meet, said, "Haven't you read what brother Wallace said on the subject?" I assured him I had, but he wanted to go into the house to get one of Wallace's books, which we did. He found the passage (Wallace had this in several of his books, including his commentary on Revelation), read it to me, and waited for my reaction.

I asked, "What passage of scripture did Wallace give?"

He looked carefully and said, "Why, none."

I said, "That's right. He said it sounded ridiculous to him, and he didn't like it in songs like 'I Love You O Lord'. It'd be nice to have a little Bible to go with that, wouldn't it?" He agreed. I then asked this distinguished gentleman, "I notice that you wear a wristwatch. Are you aware of what Foy Wallace thought about wristwatches?"

He answered, "No."

I replied, "Wallace said that any preacher who wore a wristwatch probably also wore lace panties." I then laid my hand on his knee and said, "Now, I don't know you very well yet, but you don't really wear lace panties, do you?" He responded that he most certainly did not!

I'm pretty sure he never used Wallace as his standard of authority again, and he and I became fast friends that day. We ought not to have too much reverence for great names as it hinders our understanding of the Bible.

Here are the facts on the "divine pronouns." First, the original languages of the Old and New Testaments contain no such distinctions-all the thees, thous, thys, and thines are given to us for free. When the English Catholic (or Church of England) translators translated the KJV, they just put in divine pronouns when they wanted to, and arbitrarily translated the same Hebrew and Greek words "you" other times. It was just like when they gave us Easter for Passover for free in Ac. 12.4. Neither Jesus, Paul, nor any other apostle knew anything about divine pronouns, for it was a religious tradition that came about long after they lived.

Obviously, a group of translators introduced a distinction that the writers of inspiration knew absolutely nothing about.

Second, the "divine pronouns" never indicated reverence to start with. Notice what *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* says about them: "...formerly used with special implications of 'familiarity.' "

Likewise, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* says: "...used in middle English and in early modern English into the 17th century as the appropriate form of address to an 'intimate' friend or a person of 'lower' social status than the speaker."

In other words, these special pronouns show just the opposite of what we think! The reason Quakers use thee, thou, they, and thine is that they want to show "familiarity," not reverence, since they believe in the universal brotherhood of all men.

Third, in some passages thee and thou indicate anything but reverence. When someone says, "Calling God "you" instead of thee, thou, and thine just doesn't sound reverent to me," it never did! In Job 1.8, God asked Satan, "Hast *thou* considered my servant Job?" Was God actually showing reverence (worthiness of worship) to Satan? Not for a minute! Whether God did or not, when we talk about Satan, do we address him as thou? Did Wallace? Of course not.

When Satan tempted Jesus, in Mt. 4.10, Jesus said, "Get *thee* behind me, Satan." He wasn't showing reverence for Satan; and in reality, he didn't use a different word than "you" in that passage. In Mt. 14.4, John the Baptist said to Herod, "It's not lawful for *thee* to have" your brother's wife. Was John the Baptist showing reverence for this incestuous adulterer? Is that the way Wallace addressed incestuous adulterers?

In Mt. 21.19, Jesus cursed the fig tree for being unfruitful, saying, "*Thou* shalt bear no fruit henceforth forever." Reverence? Is that the way we talk to fig trees? In Mt. 23.37, Jesus referred to the prophet killers as thou. Was that reverence? Is that the way we talk to prophet

killers? If we don't, do our brethren say, "Well, it just doesn't sound reverent to me"? In Mt. 25.26, Jesus rebuked the wicked, slothful servant as thou–not an expression of reverence at all.

In Ac. 5.4, Peter challenged Ananias, "How is it that *thou* hast conceived this in *thy* heart?" Was he showing respect for this deceiver before striking him dead? Hardly. In Ac. 8.20-22, Peter said to the sorcerer Simon, "Thy silver perish with *thee*." Was that a sign of reverence? Is that the way Wallace addressed false teachers in his day? In Ac. 13.10-11, Paul struck Bar-Jesus blind as he said, "*Thou* shalt be blind for a season." Respect for a false prophet? Is that the way we should talk about false prophets, Joseph Smith, for example? Reverence is not in the pronoun at all. In Ac. 16.18, Paul commanded a demon to come out using thee. In Ac. 23.3, Paul reprimanded the hypocritical High Priest Ananias with thou.

This issue is somewhat like that of our Roman Catholic friends, who object to the non-Latin mass on the grounds that "it's not reverent" (Imagine, the very idea that people should hear the mass in a language they can understand!) Of course, God never said that the Latin mass was reverent! He also never said thee and thou were reverent either, and both of these traditions came from the same place—Roman Catholicism.

I don't go on crusades about this, and if people think these pronouns indicate reverence, I let it go. But if they start questioning someone else's spirituality over it, or ask about it, I tell them what I've just shared here.

13:7 And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and there was given to him authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation.

So this beast was given divine permission to persecute the saints. He was being used as a tool by God to avenge the blood of all the martyrs in Jesus' generation (as he foretold in Mt. 23.29-36), as we've seen the king of Assyria was used against Israel in the Old Testament.

13:8 And all that dwell on the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **shall worship him, every one whose name hath not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain.**

Thus, the earth-dwellers (the rebellious Jews) worshiped this Roman beast, and their names were not in the book of life, the ledger of the citizens of his kingdom. Moses knew of this book (Ex. 32.32), as

did the prophets, and in Phil. 4.3, Paul mentions it. We'll see this book again in Revelation 20.

13:9 If any man hath an ear, let him hear.

John again exhorts his readers to pay careful attention to his teaching, saying, "If you can hear this, you'd better listen!" because hearing is the way to overcome the persecution and avoid the coming judgment on Old Covenant Israel.

13:10 If any man is for captivity, into captivity he goeth: if any man shall kill with the sword, with the sword must he be killed. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

This verse is a partial quotation or allusion to Jer. 15.1-3 which will help us understand John's point here in Revelation. Jeremiah was sent to Judah to warn them of impending Babylonian judgment for their idolatry:

> 1 Then the LORD said to me, Even though Moses and Samuel were to stand before Me, My heart would not be with this people; send them away from My presence and let them go! 2 And it shall be that when they say to you, Where should we go? then you are to tell them, Thus says the LORD:
>
> Those destined for death, to death;
> And those destined for the sword, to the sword;
> And those destined for famine, to famine;
> And those destined for captivity, to captivity.
>
> 3 And I shall appoint over them four kinds of doom, declares the LORD: the sword to slay, the dogs to drag off, and the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy.

Similarly, John warns his readers that if they don't listen, they may suffer two kinds of doom: they're going into captivity, as did 97,000 Jews sold into slavery by the Romans, or they might be killed, as were 1.1 million Jews. Only by listening to John's warnings will they have the patience and reliance on God that will see them through the tribulation they're involved in. (See a similar passage in Jer. 43.11.)

In v11, John sees another beast and ally of Satan, the land beast, or false prophet, as he will be called.

13:11 And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**; and he had two horns like unto a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.**

Since he arises out of the land of Israel, this beast is of a Jewish nature. Jesus had warned of false prophets during this time in Mt. 24.11, and warned of an apostasy that would lead the majority of the saints astray. This beast has an impressive peaceful appearance, like an innocent lamb, but he sounds terrible, like the dragon which empowers him. This is true of every false religion. They are impressive at the outset, yet as one investigates their teaching, they become very unimpressive. As Jesus warned in Mt. 7.21, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves."

Mormonism presents itself in a fine light; Mormons are wonderful people, with wonderful, strong families, and are zealous about propagating the teaching of Joseph Smith. Yet when one investigates their teaching on polygamy, the Negroes, how Jesus was a polygamist who got himself another wife at the wedding in Cana, Mormons become gods with their own universes, etc., the peaceful and unbiblical natures of Mormonism go away.

Jehovah's Witnesses are another impressive group. No religious people are more dedicated, working their way through our neighborhoods over and over. However, investigating their teaching further, you find that when they come to your door asking to study the Bible with you, they don't believe that you can understand the Bible at all! They believe that only the 144,000 elites can understand it, and I've never met one yet that believed he was one of the elites. Thus, they don't believe they can understand it either! The Bible study they're proposing is a complete farce! (For further information on these two groups, and many others, please see "Was Joseph Smith a Prophet of God?" and "Jehovah's Witnesses: Are They Really?" in the author's *Denominational Doctrines: Explained, Examined, Exposed*, available from Amazon.com)

These phenomena are true now, and they were true in the false religions of Rome and Judaism of the first century.

13:12 And he exerciseth all the authority of the first beast in his sight. And he maketh the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **and them dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose death-stroke was healed.**

This land beast, or false prophet, operating under the auspices of Rome, is perhaps one or more of the corrupt high priests in Jerusalem,

facilitating the worship of the revitalized sea beast by the land-dwellers.

13:13 And he doeth great signs, that he should even make fire to come down out of heaven upon the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **in the sight of men.**

The signs that this Jewish beast performs are doubtlessly false miracles, and we see examples of these in Acts 8 at the hands of Simon the sorcerer, Ac. 13.6ff (Elymas), and the pretenders of Ac. 19.13ff. Note that the next verse says these signs *deceived* the people of Israel.

13:14 And he deceiveth them that dwell on the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **by reason of the signs which it was given him to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth** (Gr. *ge*, land)**, that they should make an image to the beast who hath the stroke of the sword and lived.**

No one was ever deceived by a true miracle, for that would nullify the very purpose of miracles or signs. Miracles were called signs because they were signs that the person performing them was speaking for God (Mk. 16.20). Nicodemus, in Jn. 3.2 knew this of Jesus: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him." Nicodemus understood that if false teachers or Satan can perform true miracles, the miracles of Christ are completely nullified. In such a case, we wouldn't know who was telling the truth; it could as well be Satan as Christ! In Jn. 5.36, Jesus said of his own miracles, "...the works which the Father hath given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." Again, if Satan or his minions can perform true miracles, then we would have no way of knowing whether Christ was the son of God or the son of Satan!

Ever since God empowered people to perform true miracles to confirm his teaching, false, deceitful miracles have been propagated by impostors. When Moses performed miracles to convince Pharoah that he was acting with authority from God, Pharoah's magicians performed similar tricks and deceived Pharoah, helping harden his heart.

This land beast or false prophet supported his teaching by his deceitful miracles, and they were effective at convincing the land-dwellers in Israel to serve the Roman rulers.

13:15 And it was given unto him to give breath to it, even to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak,

and cause that as many as should not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

13:16 And he causeth all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free and the bond, that there be given them a mark on their right hand, or upon their forehead;

There's no class of society immune from the lure of the beast. We've seen this concept of marking or sealing before in Revelation. This isn't a literal mark like a tattoo. Gary DeMar in his *Last Days Madness*, lists interpretations of this mark that have been offered: bar codes, food stamps, credit cards, the draft, Adolf Hitler, Stalin, Gorbachev, etc., etc. Wouldn't all of those be of tremendous encouragement to first century Christians undergoing persecution, to know that in 2000+ years, such things would exist? Obviously not! In this vision, this mark indicates ownership, allegiance, and destiny. Those marked by the beast are owned by the beast, their allegiance is to the beast, and their destiny is the same as the beast's, the lake of fire in Revelation 20. Those sealed or marked by God are owned by him, their allegiance is to him, and they're destined to be with him. Everyone is marked. However, notice that the mark of the land dwellers, or the unfaithful to God, is on their hand (their instruments of service), and on their forehead (their intellect). The servants of Christ are marked only on their foreheads. Their service is based entirely on their intellect, voluntarily offered, not coerced, not just physical activity.

13:17 and that no man should be able to buy or to sell, save he that hath the mark, even the name of the beast or the number of his name.

Buying or selling is participating in commerce. Without the ownership, allegiance, and destiny of the beast, one couldn't participate in his commerce. Without his mark, perhaps you couldn't belong to a union to secure work for you, or obtain a license to build a business without it. A Christian couldn't participate in the worship of the emperor, so would suffer discrimination in the workplace. In our present time, Christian bakers who won't cater gay weddings are fined and hounded out of business. They've learned that if they won't go along, they can't get along, that is, participate in commerce! So with these in John's day.

13:18 Here is wisdom. He that hath understanding, let him count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man: and his number is Six hundred and sixty and six.

This sea beast has a number, the number of a man. Among oriental nations, the assigning of numbers to names, numerology, is common. Numeric values are attached to letters of the alphabet, and totaled to derive a value for the name. In the case of Nero, emperor of John's time, his name added up to 666. Actually, it's easy in any language to make anyone's name add up to whatever value you might desire. Indeed, that has been done, for innumerable individuals have been assigned this label: Hitler, Mussolini, the Pope, Martin Luther, Henry Kissinger, FDR, etc., etc. A friend of mine showed me how the name Samuel Gentry Dawson could be valued at 666. No, I'll not reveal how he did that. Most commonly, those who take the early date of writing for Revelation take this number to refer to Nero. Whether it's just the number of man or Nero, allegiance to him is nothing like allegiance to Christ; it's just allegiance to a man. In 21.17, an angel shows John the wall of New Jerusalem:

> And he measured the wall thereof, a hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.

"The measure of a man" here is not any particular man, just any man, and one involved in the worship of a man, any man, is worshiping imperfection, no matter if it's Nero or any other Roman king!

In conclusion to this chapter, we've met two allies of Satan in his persecution of saints, Rome and Judaism. Both persecuted Christians, but Biblically and historically, the Jewish persecution of Christians was much more prevalent, historic, severe, and in need of being avenged as promised by Christ in Mt. 23.29-36.

Next, we'll meet some more members of Satan's team.

Chapter 14

A Preview of God's Imminent Righteous Judgment

Wallace makes a comment at the beginning of his commentary on Revelation 14 that is worth the price of the book:

> The fact necessary to remember and observe in perusing the book of Revelation is that the entire Revelation was a visional pageantry of the oppressions of the church by imperial heathen persecuting powers during the time of then existing powers and the life of the then existing churches. (Wallace, Foy E., Jr., *The Book of Revelation*, Fort Smith: AR: Foy E. Wallace Jr. Publications, 1966, p. 304)

Perhaps this is a good reminder to remember frequently that we're not reading literal teaching in this book: we're reading the script of a pageant that John observed. Thus, we're not learning about a literal 144,000 person throng, literal marks on literal foreheads, literal harps being played, literal living creatures, the literal city of Babylon, literal wine, literal fornication, literal beasts, literal fire and brimstone, literal smoke, literal sickles, nor literal grapes, wine presses, or wine.

14:1 And I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty and four thousand, having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads.

We saw these 144,000 Old Testament saints in chapter 7. They are particularly pertinent to this vision because it's going to be focused on the Jewish harvest portrayed in this chapter. In chapter 7, it was announced that the judgment in view was not to take place until these people had been sealed, to show that they weren't going to be indis-

criminately affected by the upcoming horrendous judgment on their adversaries. That judgment is even more imminent now and is being previewed in this chapter.

14:2 And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps:

John again hears tremendously impressive voices from heaven, those of huge waterfalls and great thunderstorms, along with the joyous sound of harps of joy.

14:3 and they sing as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders: and no man could learn the song save the hundred and forty and four thousand, even they that had been purchased out of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land).

This throng is singing a new song that no one could or ever would sing other than these 144,000. We saw this song in 5.9, where the same throng is singing it to the Christ commemorating his redemption of them, and it's repeated here. This was the first time the song had been sung by these martyrs; it contained the words "thou wast slain," which was the new fact in it. The next verse tells us why only this group could sing this song.

14:4 These are they that were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were purchased from among men, to be the firstfruits unto God and unto the Lamb.

These 144,000 are depicted as virgin Jewish men—two of those terms being used metaphorically, not literally. The Jewish saints were not all males, nor were they all virgins physically. They were virgins spiritually, because they had not caved in to the worship of the Caesars nor to the false teachings of Judaism—Jewish harlotry. They were the firstfruits because as faithful Jews, they were the first ones to be redeemed by the lamb's blood. The first Jewish Christians were also considered part of the firstfruits, as James, writing to Jewish Christians says in Jas. 1.13: "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." We modern-day Christians can sing that we're redeemed, but we're not the firstfruits.

Firstfruits is an agricultural term which under the Old Covenant belonged to God, which in turn entitled them to the second fruits—the rest of the crop. The Feast of Firstfruits was also called Pentecost or

the Feast of Weeks, as it was seven weeks after Passover. These saints had been delivered from their enemies, the rebellious Jews, in the land of Israel. In this chapter, we'll see the rest of the Jewish harvest portrayed.

14:5 And in their mouth was found no lie: they are without blemish.

These Old Testament saints were of the character that they wouldn't lie, as in worshipping the beasts which were the helpers of Satan. They wouldn't confess that the Caesars were deity, nor confess allegiance to them, as they were unwilling to lie to escape tribulation or pressure.

14:6 And I saw another angel flying in mid heaven, having eternal good tidings to proclaim unto them that dwell on the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**, and unto every nation and tribe and tongue and people;**

This angel is the first out of six in this scene. The good tidings he's proclaiming are certainly not the Law of Moses, as it was addressed to one people, one nation, and one tongue, the Hebrew people, nation, and tongue. The "earth dwellers" would hold to the Mosaic Covenant, the "heaven dwellers" would hold to the New Covenant. Jesus had taught in Mt. 24.14 that the gospel ("good tidings") would be preached in the whole world before the end of the Mosaic age came. John is watching and writing very near that very end, and he's previewing that event. Jesus was speaking of the known or Roman world (not the entire planet) in his prophecy, and a number of New Testament writers vouched that his promise was fulfilled. As we see in Appendix 2, "The Olivet Discourse," Paul affirmed in Rom. 1.8 that the faith of the Romans was known "throughout the whole world." In Col. 1.5, 6, and 23, he spoke of "the truth of the gospel, which is come unto you; even as it is also in all the world, bearing fruit and increasing...continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye heard, which was preached in all creation under heaven..." Paul wrote those words in 62 AD, a full eight years before the end of the Mosaic age, when Jesus said the temple would be destroyed, in his generation.

14:7 and he saith with a great voice, Fear God, and give him glory; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made the heaven and the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **and sea and fountains of waters.**

This first angel urges the worship of God who made the heaven, land, sea, and fountains of waters, instead of worshipping the Roman emperor, a man.

Recall in Mt. 24.34, 36 Jesus said:

> 34 Verily I say unto you, *This generation* shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished...36 But of *that day and hour knoweth no one*, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only.

Jesus knew the generation when Jerusalem would be destroyed but while he was on earth, he didn't know the day or the hour. Now, forty years later, Jesus does know the hour, and he's revealed it to John who says, "the hour of his (God's) judgment is come."

Wallace makes another valuable comment on this chapter. The judgment described in this chapter is not taking place at this moment in John's vision, but it's imminent. It envisions events about to take place which will be described as fulfilled in Revelation 18. This literary device is called a prolepsis. It anticipates the judgment coming on Babylon (Jerusalem), a faithful city that had become a harlot (Rome was never called a faithful city), as if it were presently occurring or accomplished. Wallace says:

> The fourteenth chapter appears to be an intentional prolepsis—the dating of events out of chronological order—in that the scenes of judgment indicated the end of conflict and tribulation, whereas the following chapter reverted to the war against the church in accentuated fury. (*Ibid.*, p. 305)

Hence, John shows how the conflict will end before it occurs, to encourage his audience to choose the victorious team while they have opportunity.

As the angel indicates, now that the gospel has been preached as widely as Jesus prophesied, the time for the judgment of Jerusalem is come, and that all should worship God rather than any man or any other created being.

14:8 And another, a second angel, followed, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, that hath made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

The second angel announces the fall of Babylon. She has already been identified in 11.8 as the city where "the lord" of the two martyred

prophets was crucified, hence Jerusalem. When the judgment John writes of actually occurs in 18.10, 18, 20, and 24, she will be spoken of as the great city that's not only responsible for the blood of all the prophets, but also of the apostles and saints of Jesus. As Jesus said directly to Jerusalem in Mt. 23.35-36:

> 35 that upon you may come *all the righteous blood shed on the earth,* from the blood of Abel the righteous unto the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar. 36 Verily I say unto you, *All these things shall come upon this generation.*

So the gospel has been preached in all the world as Jesus foretold, and now is the time for Jerusalem to be judged, along with all those in fellowship with her sin. Rome wasn't where the Lord was crucified, nor was she guilty of the blood of the prophets, unless Jesus was plainly mistaken. If that's the case, his execution as a false prophet was called for in Dt. 18.22:

> When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

Babylon was going to fall because she influenced others to sin with her as the harlot. Since she was going to reap the wine of the wrath of God, her paramours would, as well.

This angel says that Babylon "is" fallen, not will fall. It hadn't fallen when John wrote those words, but its fall was so certain that it could be spoken of (proleptically, as Wallace said) as though it had already happened.

14:9 And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a great voice, If any man worshippeth the beast and his image, and receiveth a mark on his forehead, or upon his hand,

The third angel warns against worship of the beast by anyone: Jew, Gentile, or Christian. They are owned, approved of, and their destiny is the same as the first beast, Rome, and they will receive the same judgment as Jerusalem.

14:10 he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his anger; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:

14:11 and the smoke of their torment goeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, they that worship the beast and his image, and whoso receiveth the mark of his name.

The wine here is not literal wine, but God's undiluted wrath. Like the wine, this torment in fire and brimstone is in the pageant John's watching, not literal. Such language is used numerous times in the Old Testament to portray a total and utter national or regional judgment, as John is depicting on Jerusalem. For instance, in Isa. 34.9-10, God said of his upcoming judgment on Edom and its capitol, Bozrah, a judgment fulfilled long before Christ's first coming:

> 9 And its streams shall be turned into pitch,
> And its loose earth into *brimstone*,
> And its land shall become burning pitch.
> 10 It *shall not be quenched night or day;*
> *Its smoke shall go up forever*;
> From generation to generation it shall be desolate;
> None shall pass through it *forever and ever*.

Yet Bozrah and Edom are long gone, smoke and all! This language is also used of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. We'll see more of this language when we consider the lake of fire and brimstone in Revelation 20.

14:12 Here is the patience of the saints, they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.

This depiction of the judgment coming on the harlot and those in fellowship with her is what will produce the patient endurance of the saints. They will be motivated to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

14:13 And I heard the voice from heaven saying, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them.

Here John reveals the destiny of those Christians who die in his future. They are "blessed" or happy, and they are resting from their la-

bors, in contrast to the ones in v11 who instead of happy are tormented, and instead of resting, they have no rest day or night. Surely those two different destinies produce strong encouragement to remain faithful to Christ! Their state is also better than those under the altar of 6.9-11. Instead of being anxious and complaining for vengeance under the altar, they're happy and resting!

"In the Lord" here speaks of those in Christ, who were baptized into Christ, Rom. 6.3, Gal. 3.27), in contrast to those "fallen asleep in Jesus" in I Thes. 4.13, where the preposition *dia*, "through Jesus" is used. In Thessalonians, the phrase refers not to Christians, but to Old Testament saints who had died through or because of Jesus. Both passages refer to martyrs, one to Old Testament ones, but this one is referring to New Testament ones. (For an extended discussion on the Thessalonians passage, please see "Appendix 5, The Eschatology of Thessalonians" in the author's *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things*," available from Amazon.com.)

14:14 And I saw, and behold, a white cloud; and on the cloud I saw one sitting like unto a son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand sharp sickle.

This person is probably Christ, or at least one of his agents, sitting on a white cloud, wearing a *stephanos*, a victory crown. There are to be two harvests: the harvest of the land's grain, and the harvest of its vintage, or grapes. The harvest of the land is about to begin for he has a sharp sickle in his hand.

In Mt. 3.10-12, John the Baptist had foretold this very harvest when he said:

> 10 And even now the axe lieth at the root of the trees: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 11 I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire: 12 *whose fan is in his hand*, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor; and he will *gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will* burn up with unquenchable fire.

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the harvest was just starting, yet the winnowing fan was used at the end of the harvest for separating the wheat from the chaff. Notice that John the Baptist speaks of un-

quenchable fiery judgment coming on Old Covenant Israel just as the apostle John speaks of it in Revelation 14.

14:15 And another angel came out from the temple, crying with a great voice to him that sat on the cloud, Send forth thy sickle, and reap: for the hour to reap is come; for the harvest of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **is ripe.**

This harvest is the one Jesus spoke of in Mt. 24.30-31, the gathering of the elect. (For a full discussion of this concept of gathering, please see the section on Heb. 10.25-39 in Appendix 3, "The Theme of Imminent Judgment After the Gospels"). He had sent the harvesters out in Mt. 9.37f, saying, "The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few." In Jn. 4.34, Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that "the fields are white already unto harvest." In Mt. 13.39, he had said that "the harvest is the end of the age," the Mosaic age, when Revelation was written.

We've previously seen where Peter, in the first gospel sermon in Ac. 2.16-21, quotes from Joel 2.28-32 saying, "This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel. And it shall be in the last days..." Peter proceeds to quote Joel's prediction of the day of the Lord in Old Covenant Israel's last days, with its attendant destruction described by the sun and moon being darkened, blood, fire, and vapor of smoke. In Joel 2.32b, Joel said: "and in Jerusalem there shall be those that escape, as Jehovah hath said..." Thus the judgment coming on Jerusalem was an escapable judgment for those who listened to Jesus' warnings to flee the city when they saw the Roman armies surrounding their city. Now notice Joel 3.1-2:

> 1 For behold, *in those days and at that time*,
> When I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,
> 2 I will gather all the nations,
> And bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat.
> Then I will enter into judgment with them there

In what days and at what time? This obviously refers back to Joel 2, which Peter, speaking by inspiration, said was speaking of Old Covenant Israel's last days. Jehoshaphat (lit., the valley where Jehovah judges) was the valley on the East side of Jerusalem, with the book Kidron in its bottom, separating the Roman troops on the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem itself. Thus, Joel 3 continues right on speaking of the judgment coming on Judaism and the surrounding nations (vv11-12). (As seen in Appendix 2, "The Olivet Discourse," Joel 3 is

the basis of the judgment in Matthew 25.) This is pertinent to our study of Revelation 14 because Joel 3.13-15 foretells:

> 13 Put in the *sickle*, for the harvest is ripe.
> Come, tread, for the *wine press* is full;
> The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great.
> 14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!
> For the *day of the LORD* is near in the valley of
> decision.
> 15 The sun and moon grow dark,
> And the stars lose their brightness.

Thus, eight centuries before Christ, Joel foretold the harvest by sickle of the grain and grapes on the day of the Lord, when God harvested his nation. John is writing about it as it occurs! Note in Joel 3.21 that he concludes: "„„And I will *avenge their blood* which I have not avenged," the very theme of our book!

14:16 And he that sat on the cloud cast his sickle upon the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**; and the earth** (Gr. *ge*, land) **was reaped.**

The fourth angel announced that the time to reap had come, the land was ripe, and it was done. Our Seventh-day Adventist friends claim to be the only people in the world that preach the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 (source: *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*), which is fine, except there are six angels giving messages in this chapter! They claim the first angel's message occurred during the two decades prior to the spring of 1844. The second angel's message was then preached during the summer of 1844, and resulted in large numbers of Christians leaving their churches ("Babylon") and joining the Advent movement. The third angel's message is based on the idea that the "Seal of God" (Revelation 7:2) is the Sabbath commandment of the Ten Commandments." Adventists view their denomination as the remnant church. We certainly cannot fault their sincerity, but we can fault the time element in their view of Revelation. First, from Rev. 1.1 to 22.6, 10, John said the things in Revelation were to be fulfilled quickly, soon, and at hand, not in the 19th century. Second, the Sabbath command wasn't kept by Christians in the entire book, although faithful Jewish saints did keep the commandments of God in the Mosaic law. Third, the Sabbath commandment was never given to anyone on earth that wasn't a participant in the Mosaic law. Fourth, the Sabbath was given as a sign to Israel as a memorial of their independence from Egypt, and they were commanded to "... remember that you were a

slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day" (Dt. 5.15). The sabbath was a memorial of their winning their independence from Egypt, like November 1 is memorialized in Texas as the date on which we won our independence from Mexico in 1835. People in Vermont don't cry "Remember the Alamo," and Sabbatarians do not memorialize their winning independence from Egypt on Saturday or any other day of the week. In the Mosaic law, the Sabbath was a day off, not a day of collective worship. When they appear at our doors asking, "What is the correct day of rest and worship in the Bible?", just ask them when was the Sabbath ever called a day of worship in the Bible. (For a detailed, three-chapter discussion of the Sabbath issue, please see "Should Christians Keep the Sabbath," "Answering Sabbatarians in the Old Testament," and "Answering Sabbatarians in the New Testament" in the author's *Denominational Doctrines: Explained, Examined, Exposed*, available from Amazon.com.)

Now there's a second harvest of the land, its vintage, or grapes. These two harvests, one good and one bad, remind us of the parable of the wheat and tares (weeds) in Mt. 13.24-30:

> 24 The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man that sowed good seed in his field: 25 but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. 26 But when the blade sprang up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. 27 And the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? whence then hath it tares? 28 And he said unto them, An enemy hath done this. And the servants say unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? 29 But he saith, Nay; lest haply while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with them. 30 *Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of the harvest* I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.

In verses 36-42, Jesus explained the parable:

> 36 Then he left the multitudes, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Ex-

> plain unto us the parable of the tares of the field. 37 And he answered and said, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; 38 and the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; 39 and the enemy that sowed them is the devil: and the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are angels. 40 As therefore the tares are gathered up and burned with fire; so shall it be in the *end of the world* (Gr. *aionios*, age, the Mosaic age–SGD). 41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, 42 and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

According to Jesus, the harvest would be at the end of the Mosaic age, which is when the wheat and tares would be separated and the tares burned, and when the vintage of the land would be put in the wine press and the wine of God's wrath produced. According to schedule, John writes Revelation at the end of the Mosaic age, and he's depicting two harvests, one of grain and another of vintage, just like Jesus did, one of wheat, and one of tares.

14:17 Another angel came out from the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.

This angel is the fifth one in this scene, and the next verse describes the sixth.

14:18 And another angel came out from the altar, he that hath power over fire; and he called with a great voice to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Send forth thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**; for her grapes are fully ripe.**

Note that this angel comes from the altar, where we heard the plea of the martyred saints crying out for vengeance. They were told to wait for a little time, and that time is now up. It's particularly appropriate that the angel from the altar initiated it. It's also appropriate that this angel had power over fire, for the judgment on Jerusalem was always spoken of as a fiery one, as John the Baptist had foretold (Mt. 3.10-11), to burn the chaff with unquenchable fire, and as Jesus had described it as unquenchable fire in Gehenna. (for a thorough discussion of Gehen-

na and hell, please see "Jesus' Teaching on Hell" in the author's *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last things*, or his *The Teaching of Jesus: From Sinai to Gehenna, A Faithful Rabbi Urgently Warns Rebellious Israel.*)

Israel was always depicted as God's choice vine. Perhaps this is best seen in Isa. 5.1-7:

> 1 Let me sing now for my well-beloved
> A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard.
> My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.
> 2 And He dug it all around, removed its stones,
> And planted it with the choicest vine.
> And He built a tower in the middle of it,
> And hewed out a wine vat in it;
> Then He expected it to produce good grapes,
> But it produced only worthless ones.
> 3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,
> Judge between Me and My vineyard.
> 4 What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it?
> Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?
> 5 So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard:
> I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed;
> I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground.
> 6 And I will lay it waste;
> It will not be pruned or hoed,
> But briars and thorns will come up.
> I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it.
> 7 For *the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel*,
> And the men of Judah His delightful plant.
> Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed;
> For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.

The nation of Israel was God's vineyard throughout its history. God had cleared the land of Canaan of all weeds and stones, and planted his vineyard, watered it, and tended it, because he intended it to produce fruit. When God came looking for fruit, he was continually

disappointed, for the fruits of righteousness he expected were just not there. In Dt. 32.32-33, the Song of Moses written just before the death of Moses, Moses foretold the end of Old Covenant Israel from its beginning, as we discussed earlier in the book. He characterized the kind of vineyard Old Covenant Israel would be at the end:

> 32 For their vine is from the vine of Sodom,
> And from the fields of Gomorrah;
> Their grapes are grapes of poison,
> Their clusters, bitter.
> 33 Their wine is the venom of serpents,
> And the deadly poison of cobras.

Moses wrote this description of Old Covenant Israel 1500 years before John wrote nearly the same description, word for word! This behavior continued all the way through the Mosaic age. In the time of Revelation, he's about to destroy the vineyard of Old Covenant Israel, all in response to the martyrs' prayer in 6.9-11.

14:19 And the angel cast his sickle into the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**, and gathered the vintage of the earth** (Gr. *ge*, land)**, and cast it into the winepress, the great winepress, of the wrath of God.**

In Isa. 63.1-6, Isaiah pictures God's harvest of the vintage of Edom in the same way John's doing it with Old Covenant Israel:

> 1 Who is this who comes from Edom,
> With garments of glowing colors from Bozrah,
> This One who is majestic in His apparel,
> Marching in the greatness of His strength?
> It is I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.
> 2 Why is Your apparel red,
> And Your garments like the one who treads in the
> wine press?
> 3 I have trodden the wine trough alone,
> And from the peoples there was no man with Me.
> I also trod them in My anger,
> And trampled them in My wrath
> And their lifeblood is sprinkled on My garments,
> And I stained all My raiment.
> 4 For the day of vengeance was in My heart,
> And My year of redemption has come.
> 5 And I looked, and there was no one to help,

> And I was astonished and there was no one to uphold;
> So My own arm brought salvation to Me;
> And My wrath upheld Me.
> 6 And I trod down the peoples in My anger,
> And made them drunk in My wrath,
> And I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.

We'll see this figure again in Revelation 19 as part of the vengeance on the harlot, and we'll see there that Jesus was the one doing the treading. These passages are the basis of the hymn "Battle Hymn of the Republic" which speaks of the Lord tramping out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. These passages are speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem in vindication of the martyrs.

14:20 And the winepress was trodden without the city, and there came out blood from the winepress, even unto the bridles of the horses, as far as a thousand and six hundred furlongs.

Since the winepress was outside the city of Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified and his blood was shed, it's appropriate that the blood of his enemies was shed there as well. It's been suggested, perhaps wisely so, that this referred to the Roman armies with their catapults and siege engines that poured arrows, stones, burning oil, etc., over the wall into the city, figuratively pressing the wine from the grapes.

In the spring of AD 70, during Passover, when all the Jewish men and most of their families were gathered inside the wall, the Roman general Titus surrounded the city and extracted Jerusalem's life blood from the winepress. Josephus (*Wars*, 6, 9, 3) informs us that there could have been three million Jews inside Jerusalem during Passover:

> And that this city could contain so many people in it is manifest by that number of them which was taken under Cestius, who being desirous of informing Nero of the power of the city, who otherwise was disposed to condemn that nation, entreated the high priests, if the thing were possible, to take the number of their whole multitude. So these high priests, upon the coming of their feast which is called the Passover, when they slay their sacrifices, from the ninth hour till the eleventh, but so that a company not less than ten belong to every sacrifice (for it is not lawful for them to feast singly by themselves), and many of us are twenty in a company, found the number of sacrifices was two hundred and

> fifty-six thousand five hundred; which, upon the allowance of no more than ten that feast together, amounts to two million seven hundred thousand and two hundred persons that were pure and holy...

In the pageant he was watching, John said the blood flowed out 1600 furlongs (Gr. *stadia*, very nearly 1/8 mi, variously translated into miles, cubits, etc.) or 200 miles, the length of the entire land of Israel. In effect, the Romans took the life of the nation of Old Covenant Israel. While this picture is not intended to be taken literally, Josephus did say that 1,337,490 Jews shed their blood in Jerusalem. If we assumed that each of them shed 1.5 gallons of blood, that would have been 2,000,000 gallons, a tremendous amount of bloodshed!

Josephus wrote of the bloodshed throughout the land of Israel in the 3-1/2 year Roman-Jewish War:

> A stream of blood flowed down the temple's steps, and the bodies of those slain at the top slipped to the bottom...The blood seemed more abundant than the flames...They choked the alleys with corpses and deluged the entire city with gore, so that many fires were quenched by the blood of the slain. (*Wars*, 6,4.6; 6,5.1; 6,8.5)

Chapter 15

The Seven Bowls of Wrath Introduced

After the preview of God's imminent judgment on Jerusalem in Chapter 14, an interruption from the conclusion of Chapter 13, John goes back to the next stage of his warnings—introducing the angels with the plagues. He's revealed the seals which portended the judgment (chapters 5-6) and the trumpets which warned of it (chapters 7-8): we now come to the plagues (which in 16.1 are called bowls of wrath), and in Chapter 16, we'll see the bowls of wrath finally being poured out on Jerusalem. This order of seals, trumpets, and bowls of wrath is the pattern used by parents with their children: we reveal to them what our will is. When they disobey it, we trumpet the warnings of what's ahead if they don't obey, and when they still disobey, we punish them. God does the same with his children.

15:1 And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having seven plagues, which are the last, for in them is finished the wrath of God.

The origin of the concept of God punishing Old Covenant Israel seven times for their sin is found in Lev. 26.18 (similar to the law of blessings and cursings in Deuteronomy 28):

> If also after these things, you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.

Further, if they still didn't repent, God warned in Lev. 26.27-32:

> 27 Yet if in spite of this, you do not obey Me, but act with hostility against Me, 28 then I will act with wrathful hostility against you; and I, even I, will punish you seven times for your sins. 29 Further, you shall

> eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters you shall eat. 30 I then will destroy your high places, and cut down your incense altars, and heap your remains on the remains of your idols; for My soul shall abhor you. 31 I will lay waste your cities as well, and will make your sanctuaries desolate; and I will not smell your soothing aromas. 32 And I will make the land desolate so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled over it. 33 You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste.

Thus we're about to see the seven last plagues or curses on Israel. This pouring out of God's wrath on Old Covenant Israel was (as we saw in the introductory chapter) foretold as early as Deuteronomy 32 (in the song of Moses at the beginning of the nation), Isaiah 2-4, Malachi 4, Mt. 3.10-11 (in the preaching of John the Baptist), and in the preaching of Jesus. Thus far in Revelation, we've seen references to God's wrath in 6.16, where in response to God's judgments, rebellious Jews were running into the caves and pleading for the rocks to fall on them, hiding from the *wrath* of the Lamb. In 6.17, it is said that "the great day of their *wrath* is come." In 14.8, "Babylon the great...hath made all the nations to drink of the wine of the *wrath* of her fornication," and in 14.10, those participating with her "shall drink of the wine of the *wrath* of God..." In 14.19, the harvest of the vintage was "cast into the winepress, the great winepress of the *wrath* of God." Thus, after all the revelations and warnings of God's wrath, we're about to see the outpouring of the bowls of God's wrath *on the land* (16.1). Since these judgments are coming on the land, most references to "beasts" will probably be to the land beast.

These plagues are referred to at the conclusion of Revelation in 22.18. Please see our comments there.

15:2 And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire; and them that come off victorious from the beast, and from his image, and from the number of his name, standing by the sea of glass, having harps of God.

This time, the throne of God is still surrounded by the sea of glass, still showing the calmness and serenity of God's rule, but it's mingled with fire, portraying the condition of executing imminent judgment on the land.

John again sees the saints that have come off victorious and out of the great tribulation from the sea beast and his image by their martyrdom. This is how they were victorious—by not loving their lives even unto death. Their joy is reflected by their instruments of joy—their harps.

15:3 And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are thy ways, thou King of the ages.

This time they're not complaining because their deaths haven't been avenged, as in 6.9-11, as they now know their blood is about to be avenged on the harlot, Jerusalem. As we've seen, they're singing the victorious song of Moses from Ex. 15.1ff, which reflected the victory of Israel over Pharaoh in the first exodus from captivity. The song of the Lamb likely indicates the triumph of God's saints over spiritual Egypt, Jerusalem (Rev. 11.8), their victory during the second exodus out of the beast. Here's what they sing:

15:4 Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy; for all the nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy righteous acts have been made manifest.

They praise God for his manifest or obvious righteous judgment, his holiness, and because now all the nations, even the Gentiles, will inhabit the new spiritual Jerusalem under the new covenant, which we'll see in Chapter 21.

15:5 And after these things I saw, and the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened:

With the destruction of the physical temple in Jerusalem imminent, God's dwelling place—tabernacle or temple—is now in heaven, and it's opened for use.

15:6 and there came out from the temple the seven angels that had the seven plagues, arrayed with precious stone, pure and bright, and girt about their breasts with golden girdles.

Now that the temple in heaven is functioning, the seven angels with the seven plagues make their appearance all decked out in their radiant white garments adorned with precious ornaments, though they're about to do a terrible duty.

15:7 And one of the four living creatures gave unto the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.

"The" four living creatures are the cherubim we met in chapter 4, and they're still on the job, here delegating the bowls of wrath of God to the lesser angels.

15:8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and none was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels should be finished.

From the very beginning in the law of Moses (Ex. 40.34-35) we are told that when the tabernacle was filled with the glory of God, no one could enter it:

> 34 Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 35 And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

The time for the end of Old Covenant Israel was here, and while its judgment was taking place, the temple was filled with the smoke of God's glory, and no one was admitted until the judgment was over. The time for interceding for Old Covenant Israel was over.

Chapter 16

The Bowls of Wrath Poured Out

16:1 And I heard a great voice out of the temple, saying to the seven angels, Go ye, and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God into the earth (Gr. *ge*, land).

The seals revealing God's judgments on the harlot have been opened and the trumpets warning her of their imminence have been blown, bringing partial judgments on Jerusalem and Judea ("the land"). Now we have all seven bowls of wrath being poured out on the land to execute those judgments on Jerusalem.

16:2 And the first went, and poured out his bowl into the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**; and it became a noisome and grievous sore upon the men that had the mark of the beast, and that worshiped his image.**

As the first trumpet was a partial judgment on the land (8.7), the first bowl of wrath was poured out into the land (of Palestine), producing grievous and running sores on the men who were owned by, loyal to, and destined to be with the sea beast—the Roman empire—as they worshiped the image of the empire. These running sores remind us of what God brought on the Egyptians as he proceeded to get his people out of Egypt. In Ex. 9.8-9, we read:

> 8 Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, Take for yourselves handfuls of soot from a kiln, and let Moses throw it toward the sky in the sight of Pharaoh. 9 And it will become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and will become boils breaking out with sores on man and beast through all the land of Egypt.

It seems ironic and appropriate that those who had been redeemed from Egypt now have the curses of Egypt on them, yet it's entirely ap-

propriate since they've returned to the house of bondage, and are behaving like Sodom and Egypt (11.8)! In Dt. 28.27, in the law of blessings and cursings, Moses had said:

> The LORD will smite you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors and with the scab and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed.

In Revelation, we're now seeing the fulfillment of that law on the last generation of Old Covenant Israel.

16:3 And the second poured out his bowl into the sea; and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living soul died, even the things that were in the sea.

As the second trumpet was a partial judgment on the sea (8.8), the second bowl of wrath was poured into the sea. In 8.9, we briefly discussed several naval battles on the Mediterranean and the Sea of Galilee during the Roman-Jewish War. Since the bowls of wrath were to be poured out on the land (v1), I lean more towards the Sea of Galilee as being the sea spoken of here.

Josephus gives an account of Vespasian's conquest of a village called Taricheae on the Sea of Galilee. The Jews there lured Vespasian into a battle on the sea, whereupon Vespasian hastily built some ships and pursued them:

> Sometimes the Romans leaped into their ships, with swords in their hands, and slew them; but when some of them met the vessels, the Romans caught them by the middle, and destroyed at once their ships and themselves who were taken in them. And for such as were drowning in the sea, if they lifted their heads up above the water, they were either killed by darts, or caught by the vessels: but if, in the desperate case they were in, they attempted to swim to their enemies, *the Romans cut off either their heads or their hands*; and indeed they were destroyed after various manners every where, till the rest being put to flight, were forced to get upon the land, while the vessels encompassed them about [on the sea]: but as many of these were repulsed when they were getting ashore, they were killed by the darts upon the lake; and the Romans leaped out of their vessels, and destroyed a great many more upon

> the land: *one might then see the lake all bloody*, and full of dead bodies, for not one of them escaped. And a terrible stink, and a very sad sight there was on the following days over that country; for as for the shores, they were full of shipwrecks, and of dead bodies all swelled; and as the dead bodies were inflamed by the sun, and putrefied, they corrupted the air, insomuch that the misery was not only the object of commiseration to the Jews, but to those that hated them, and had been the authors of that misery. This was the upshot of the sea-fight. *The number of the slain, including those that were killed in the city before, was six thousand and five hundred.* (*Wars*, 3, 10, 9)

16:4 And the third poured out his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of the waters; and it became blood.

The third trumpet warned of a partial judgment on the rivers of the land (8.10), and the corresponding bowl of wrath affects the same target, and the angel pouring out this bowl pronounces the judgment on the waters to be just.

16:5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying, Righteous art thou, who art and who wast, thou Holy One, because thou didst thus judge:

No one complained that the judgments poured out on the land were too harsh or too cruel. They realized the judgments were justly deserved. They had spilled the blood of the martyrs until the cup of God's wrath was full, and now the martyrs were going to be vindicated. Again, in Mt. 23.29-36, Jesus said he would avenge all the martyrs on Jerusalem in his generation. Now it's happening.

16:6 for they poured out the blood of the saints and the prophets, and blood hast thou given them to drink: they are worthy.

Who, other than Jerusalem, could possibly be held responsible for shedding the blood of the martyrs, and who else could have been judged for it (Mt. 23.29-36)? If Jesus knew what he was talking about, no one. If he didn't, there's no point in studying the Bible further, is there?

It is noteworthy that the next voice is from the altar, where in 6.9-11, the martyred saints complained that their blood hadn't been

avenged. Listen to their reaction when they see this bowl of wrath poured out:

16:7 And I heard the altar saying, Yea, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.

No more complaints! They see their prayer being answered in a timely fashion.

16:8 And the fourth poured out his bowl upon the sun; and it was given unto it to scorch men with fire.

The fourth trumpet (8.12) and the fourth bowl of wrath go together, though the trumpet also affected the moon and stars.

16:9 And men were scorched with great heat: and they blasphemed the name of God who hath the power over these plagues; and they repented not to give him glory.

The people of the land who suffered from this bowl of wrath blasphemed (lit., spoke against) God's name, and still did not repent of their unfaithfulness to him. This reminds us of similar plagues occurring in Egypt, and rather than repenting, Pharaoh hardening his heart. Now the descendants of those who escaped from Egypt are exhibiting the same behavior.

16:10 And the fifth poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast; and his kingdom was darkened; and they gnawed their tongues for pain,

Since verse 1 tells us that these bowls of wrath were all being poured out on the land, i.e., Palestine. This beast is undoubtedly the land beast, and his throne is his seat of power, probably that of the High Priest in Jerusalem, by this time a puppet of the Roman government. Judaism and its adherents, the land-dwellers or the rebellious Jews, were feeling the pain of their kingdom being darkened. Its lights were about to be put out!

On the other hand, since this beast is not specifically identified, it's well to point out that some commentators think this beast is Rome, his throne is in Rome, and the reference is to the instability of the empire after Nero's suicide. In verse 13, we'll see both the land and sea beasts in the context.

16:11 and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they repented not of their works.

Throughout the Bible, God brought partial judgments on wayward nations to try to get them to repent, change their way of thinking, and their course. Many times, those partial judgments (famine, pestilence, drought, etc.) produced repentance. In this case, rather than repent and turn back to God, they blasphemed him and still refused to repent.

The same thing happens with individuals. Sometimes, people get sick, it causes them to reflect on their life, and they change their way of life for the better. Others perhaps get cancer, blame God for it, curse God, and the same disease drives them further away from God. As someone has correctly said, "The same sun that melts butter also hardens concrete." The same trials that soften some hearts also hardens others. It happens with individuals, nations, and it happened to Old Covenant Israel.

16:12 And the sixth poured out his bowl upon the great river, the river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way might by made ready for the kings that come from the sunrising.

This sixth bowl corresponds to the sixth trumpet of 9.13-14. The Euphrates River was the eastern boundary between the Roman Empire and Parthia, Rome's perpetual enemy. The river drying up would permit crossing that boundary so much easier for Rome's enemies to the east.

16:13 And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits, as it were frogs:

John now sees Satan, the Roman empire, and Judaism as unclean spirits, like frogs. How strange to see Old Covenant Israel in fellowship with Satan and the pagan Romans!

16:14 for they are spirits of demons, working signs; which go forth unto the kings of the whole world, to gather them together unto the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.

These demonic spirits perform "miracles" (see our comments on deceitful miracles in 13.14) to deceive the whole world (*oikoumene*, the Roman world), and lure them into war with Almighty God on His great day, the day of the Lord, or, as we saw in 1.10, the Lord's Day.

The Romans had troops along the Euphrates to protect against Parthian invasion, but they called those troops to Jerusalem for the war with the Jews, leaving the eastern border unguarded. Mills cites two

historical sources regarding the Romans bringing their troops together in Northern Palestine:

> "...the time of Vespasian two legions (one myriad) were quartered along the upper waters of the Euphrates," (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1907 ed., *Vol. 1*, p.786). Add to this, "Vespasian sent his son to Alexandria to bring back two legions (one myriad), and meet him north of Israel for the war," *Josephus, Wars of the Jews*, bk. 3, ch. 1. 1, 2. (Mills, *op. cit.* p. 19)

So far in Revelation, when it looks like the worst is about to happen, the vision will pause and tell the faithful, "Don't worry, faithful saints, you won't have to suffer this if you're watchful." The very next verse contains that exact assurance for the faithful.

16:15 (Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.)

Most thieves are so inconsiderate that they don't send announcements telling us which evening they're coming, but we can still be prepared for them. Jesus urges his faithful that, even though they don't know when he's coming, they can be watchful and prepared. They should keep their garments (their righteous acts, 19.8) pure and white. They're not going to want to be caught spiritually naked in the upcoming conflict.

Here, Jesus says he's coming as a thief on the great day of God in a book where he began and ended by saying the things in Revelation were coming to pass soon, the time was at hand, and that he was coming quickly. Now he says he's coming as a thief in that same time frame.

In Mt. 24.43-44, Jesus said he would come as a thief, in Mt. 24.36. He said he was coming in his generation, the same time he's speaking of in Revelation. In Mt. 23.29-36, he said he was coming to avenge the blood of all the martyrs on Jerusalem in his generation, the same generation in which Revelation was written.

If in the gospels Jesus was coming as a thief in his generation to avenge the blood of all the martyrs on Jerusalem, and thirty years later in Revelation he's coming as a thief soon to avenge the blood of the martyrs on Jerusalem, do you think he's talking about the same coming? The same vengeance on Jerusalem? For the same reason? In the same way, as a thief? Or do you think he's talking about two different comings in the same generation for the same purpose, on the same city,

in the same way? Did he destroy Jerusalem twice in the same generation?

In both the gospels and Revelation, Jesus' coming as a thief simply meant that, although the saints knew the generation in which he was coming, they didn't know the day or the hour, just as you don't know the day or the hour when the next thief is coming to your home. However, that doesn't mean you can't be prepared for him.

Here's some food for thought. In I Thes. 5.2, 4, Paul said that Jesus was coming on the day of the Lord as a thief. In the context of the Thessalonian epistles, they were suffering persecution by the Jews, and Paul said in II Thes. 1.6 to recompense affliction on their Jewish persecutors, and give rest to the persecuted saints at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven when he came to render vengeance on them that know not God and to them that obey not the gospel. Have they not received their rest yet, after 2000 years? Also, Paul said in II Thes. 1.4-8 that the man of sin was alive as he wrote, sitting in the temple of God (not the Vatican), whom Jesus would slay when he came. If Jesus didn't return in his generation as he promised, do you suppose the man of sin is still alive, 2000+ years later? He's certainly not in the temple, for it's been gone those 2000 years! (for a complete treatment of the eschatology of Thessalonians, please see Appendix 5, "The Eschatology of Thessalonians" in the author's *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things*, available at Amazon.com.)

One other "coming as a thief in the night" passage similar to these: In II Peter 3.9-13, Peter is combating false teachers who, in the 60s, were boasting because Jesus' promise to return in his generation hadn't been fulfilled. Peter assured them that it was going to occur:

> 9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to youward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. 10 But *the day of the Lord* will *come as a thief*; in the which the *heavens* shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the *earth* (Gr. *ge*, land) and the works that are therein shall be burned up. 11 Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, 12 looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the

> *elements* shall melt with fervent heat? 13 But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth (Gr. *ge*, land), wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Here's another prophecy of Christ's coming fulfilled on the day of the Lord, which would come as a thief in the night, and Christians being told to be watchful for it because the Lord isn't slow about fulfilling his promises. We'll discuss this passage more fully at 20.11.

For a complete discussion of this passage and its first century fulfillment, please see the chapter "II Peter 3: Destruction of the Universe or Destruction of Jerusalem?" in the author's *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last things*, available at Amazon.com.

16:16 And they gathered them together into the place which is called in Hebrew Har-Magedon.

Here, the kings of the land gathered their forces (Titus from the Euphrates and Caesarea, where Vespasian brought his troops into Palestine) together at Armageddon. Notice that although there have been decisive battles fought there in times past, there's no battle here now, regardless of how many thousand times we've heard sermons from Hal Lindsey, C. I. Scofield, Tim LaHaye, Billy James Hargis, etc., etc., read pamphlets and watched movies touting "the battle of Armageddon," about to occur in our time The term never occurs in scripture!

Actually, the modern view of the "battle of Armageddon" is just that: modern. Its perpetrators haven't always taught it was going to be a final battle between Christ and Satan involving the Russians, the Muslims, the Jews, the Arabs, etc. In World War II, the view was that it was the great battle between Germany, Italy, and Japan against England, France, and the United States. If that was the case, wouldn't that have been encouraging to Christians in tribulation back in the first century? Would they have thought, "Hot dog! Times are really bad for us Christians in the first century, but Praise God, 2000 years from now the US, England, and France are going to whip Hitler, Mussolini, and Hirohito! That's really encouraging to us! I think I can make it now!" It would have had no meaning to them whatsoever, would it?

No, first century Christians in this tribulation knew who was involved in this battle: Satan, Rome, and Jerusalem. They knew why the judgment was coming: to avenge the blood of all the martyrs in their generation, just as Jesus had promised.

The Bible says (and history does, as well) that the Romans gathered their forces together on the plain of Megiddo, from where they

were going to march to where the battle was: Jerusalem! Armageddon was merely a staging area at this time. The battle will take place in chapter 19.

16:17 And the seventh poured out his bowl upon the air; and there came forth a great voice out of the temple, from the throne, saying, It is done:

In 10.7, when the seventh trumpet sounded, there was no more delay in avenging the martyrs. That was the completion of the mystery of God: when Old Testament prophecies of God's vengeance on Old Covenant Israel would be complete. Here, when the seventh bowl is poured out, heaven pronounces that the mystery is done. This is the same teaching we've already noticed in Lk. 22.20 and Mt. 5.17-18 in Chapter 10. We're not aware of any prophecy in the prophets that was fulfilled past the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

16:18 and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunders; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since there were men upon the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**, so great an earthquake, so mighty.**

We've seen these lightnings, voices, and thunders before. In Exodus 19, when Moses brought the Israelites from Egypt to Mt. Sinai, God demonstrated his absolute power and ability to deliver and protect them. These serve exactly the same purpose here, as God is about to powerfully deliver his saints again in their exodus from Old Covenant Jerusalem.

This great earthquake may be the same quake we took as literal in 11.13, as described by Josephus, or perhaps it was the "shakeup" God had promised on Old Covenant Israel (as we'll see in v20), for this language had been used several times in scripture to describe God's judgments on nations. In Hag. 2.3ff, Haggai is sent to speak to Zerubbabel, who was rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem after Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed Solomon's temple in 586 BC and taken the Jews into Babylonian captivity. As the temple was being rebuilt, some obstructionists were complaining that the temple wasn't as glorious as Solomon's had been. Haggai's message to them was that if you build it like God wants, it will be just fine, so get back to work. Then, in Hag. 2.6-9, God says:

> 6 For thus says the LORD of hosts, *Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. 7 And I will shake*

> *all the nations*; and they will come with the wealth of all nations; and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts. 8 The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, declares the LORD of hosts. 9 The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts, and in this place I shall give peace, declares the LORD of hosts.

Thus, in using the same language about earthquakes that John hears in Revelation, God speaks to Haggai of the shaking of the nations and national judgments on surrounding nations that would bring the wealth of those nations into Jerusalem for rebuilding the temple.

In Hag. 2.21-22, Haggai is told to speak to Zerubbabel a second time:

> 21 Speak to Zerubbabel governor of Judah saying, *I am going to shake the heavens and the earth*. 22 And I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the power of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders will go down, everyone by the sword of another.

Again, God's shaking the heavens and the earth was nothing more than national judgment on Israel's surrounding nations, just the way it's being used here in Revelation. God's big shakeup of Old Covenant Israel is at hand!

In Heb. 12.25-28, the author of Hebrews is writing in the 60s AD to Jewish Christians (who have obeyed the gospel and are no longer under the law of Moses) living in the vicinity of the temple and are under pressure to cave in and go back to Judaism. He says:

> 25 See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not when they refused him that warned them on earth, much more shall not we escape who turn away from him that warneth from heaven: 26 whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, *Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but also the heaven*. 27 And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain. 28 *Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shak-*

> *en*, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe: 29 for *our God is a consuming fire*.

The Hebrews writer is reminding these Jewish Christians that they're now in the Messiah's kingdom which cannot be shaken, and that will never be destroyed (and will thus never disappear, Mt. 16.18), so do not to go back into Judaism which is imminently to be shaken and removed by a God who is a consuming fire! They don't want to be in on that great, unique earthquake! Recall how Jesus had described it in Mt. 24.21:

> ...for then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be.

Wasn't Jesus talking about the same unique shakeup coming in his generation (Mt. 24.34) that John is discussing in Revelation?

16:19 And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and Babylon the great was remembered in the sight of God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

John speaks of Babylon as already having fallen. It's fall was imminent, but so certain, that God, "who calls things that are not as though they were" (Rom. 4.17), can speak of it as already fulfilled.

During the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, the city was divided in several ways. It was divided physically into the Upper City, Lower City, and Ophel. It was also divided politically by three factions of zealots within the city led by Eleazar son of Simon, John of Gischala, and Simeon, an Idumean. As we've noted previously, the constant warfare within the city caused more deaths in Jerusalem than the Roman armies could accomplish.

But we may see the same thing in the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon in Ezekiel's time. In Ezek. 5.1-4, 11-12, he was told:

> 1 As for you, son of man, take a sharp sword; take and use it as a barber's razor on your head and beard. Then take scales for weighing and divide the hair. 2 One third you shall burn in the fire at the center of the city, when the days of the siege are completed. Then you shall take one third and strike it with the sword all around the city, and one third you shall scatter to the

> wind; and I will unsheathe a sword behind them. 3 Take also a few in number from them and bind them in the edges of your robes. 4 And take again some of them and throw them into the fire, and burn them in the fire; from it a fire will spread to all the house of Israel...11 So as I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable idols and with all your abominations, therefore I will also withdraw, and My eye shall have no pity and I will not spare. 12 *One third of you will die by plague or be consumed by famine among you, one third will fall by the sword around you, and one third I will scatter to every wind, and I will unsheathe a sword behind them.*

So in 586 BC one third of Jerusalem's occupants would be destroyed by famine, one third by death, and one third by fire, with a complete destruction, and many cities of the nations (tribes) were destroyed as well. They were all remembered in the sight of God. He didn't forget anything.

Josephus, an eyewitness, bore witness to the divisions in Jerusalem:

> ...it so happened that the sedition at Jerusalem was revived, and parted into three factions, and that one faction fought against the other; which partition in such evil cases may be said to be a good thing, and the effect of Divine justice. (*Wars*, 5, 1, 1)

When it is said that "the cities of the nations fell," the nations are the tribes (another translation of the same word translated nations) of Israel. Josephus (*Wars*, 2, 18, "The Calamities and Slaughters That Came Upon the Jews") lists many of the cities the Romans conquered in their march toward Jerusalem. In many cases, thousands and tens of thousands of lives were taken every night and their bodies were left in heaps. In Caesarea, Josephus says that twenty thousand Jews were killed in one hour! Josephus himself, a Jewish general at Jotapota, northeast of Jerusalem, was conquered by Vespasian with the loss of 40,000 lives. He surrendered to Vespasian, and later became his historian.

16:20 And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

Again, this language is used many times by the prophets of national judgments. Many times we say, "We've never seen anything like that, so it has to be down at the end of time." No, students of the Old Testament in John's time had never heard such language used of anything except a national judgment. In Ezek. 26.15-18, it's used in a prophecy of Tyre's destruction:

> 15 Thus says the Lord GOD to Tyre, Shall not the coastlands shake at the sound of your fall when the wounded groan, when the slaughter occurs in your midst? 16 Then all the princes of the sea will go down from their thrones, remove their robes, and strip off their embroidered garments. They will clothe themselves with trembling; they will sit on the ground, tremble every moment, and be appalled at you. 17 And they will take up a lamentation over you and say to you,
>
> How you have perished, O inhabited one,
> From the seas, O renowned city,
> Which was mighty on the sea,
> She and her inhabitants,
> Who imposed her terror
> On all her inhabitants!
> 18 Now the coastlands will tremble

This prophecy was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar, emperor of Babylon, captured the land of Israel in 587-586 BC. Likewise, the disappearance of the mountains may well have been because they "melted," as in Nah. 1.5, speaking of the destruction of Nineveh by Nebuchadnezzar as well.

16:21 And great hail, every stone about the weight of a talent, cometh down out of heaven upon men: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof is exceeding great.

These hailstones weighing about a hundred pounds each, were doubtlessly a reference to the missiles, stones, and arrows, that the Romans were lobbing into the walled city of Jerusalem with their great siege engines they had brought with them.

Recall that Jesus had told his disciples in Mt. 24.15-21: to flee to the mountains when they saw the Roman abominations. Those that

trusted Christ watched, fled, and escaped. Yet the unrepentant Jews inside, who had refused Jesus' instructions to flee the city when they saw Jerusalem compassed with the Roman armies, went through the tribulation, went through the siege, suffered unique torment in the annals of man. And, as they died, they still blasphemed God for abandoning them, when in reality they had abandoned God, and they still wouldn't repent!

Truly as the writer of Hebrews said in Heb. 4.4-6 of Jewish Christians who caved in and went back into Judaism:

> 4 For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, 6 *and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance*; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

We use this passage to show that it's possible for people who really have been Christians and in fellowship with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit to fall away. Although it's not true of all who do fall away, it's possible for one to fall away to the extent that they can't even repent. Those are the very ones John's telling us about in Old Covenant Israel.

With the conclusion of this chapter, the seals have revealed what's going to happen to Jerusalem and Judea, the trumpets have warned of the coming events, and the bowls of wrath have executed what's about to happen on the day of the Lord—the war of the great day of God Almighty.

Chapter 17

Babylon the Harlot

After the pouring out of the bowls of wrath, it remains only to meet the great harlot, the last character on Satan's team for his upcoming battle with the Lamb. After this chapter, we'll begin seeing the members of Satan's team falling in reverse order, the harlot (chapter 18), the two beasts (chapter 19), and finally, Satan himself (chapter 20).

17:1 And there came one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls, and spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the judgment of the great harlot that sitteth upon many waters;

This is the first time the word "harlot" occurs in Revelation, and one of the seven angels with the bowls of wrath shows her to John. The word "harlot" comes from *porne*, one who commits fornication—any illicit sexual intercourse in general. In the Old Testament, Tyre was spoken of as a harlot of commerce (Isa. 23.15-17), Nineveh was spoken of as a harlot of conquest (Nah. 3.4), Babylon was a harlot of wealth (Isa. 47.5-15), and Jerusalem was called a harlot of religion. In Isa. 1.21, God spoke of Jerusalem (and he never had of Rome) in this manner:

> *How the faithful city has become a harlot,*
> She who was full of justice!
> Righteousness once lodged in her,
> But now murderers.

Obviously, Isaiah's not speaking of literal Babylon in Iraq, nor literal fornication, but spiritually so. She's spoken of as "sitting on many waters." Jeremiah referred to literal Babylon as sitting on many waters in Jer. 51.13. These are not literal waters, like the Mediterranean Sea,

because v15 tells us: "The waters which thou sawest, where the harlot sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." We'll see momentarily that the harlot is Jerusalem, but we can see at this point that Jerusalem did sit on many such waters. In Ac. 2.5, 9-11, we can see that she did indeed hold sway over many peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues On the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ, Luke tells us of the Jews gathered in Jerusalem, those who heard the first gospel sermon:

> 5 Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven... 8 And how hear we, every man in our own language wherein we were born? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, in Judaea and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, 10 in Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and sojourners from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabians, we hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty works of God.

All these nationalities were in Jerusalem because of the sway Jerusalem held over them. It was the worldwide headquarters of their religion. Even Babylon in Iraq was said to sit on many waters (Jer. 51.13) yet she was a land-locked nation. She too had a great deal of sway over surrounding nations.

17:2 with whom the kings of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **committed fornication, and they that dwell in the earth** (Gr. *ge*, land) **were made drunken with the wine of her fornication.**

The kings of the land of Israel committed spiritual fornication with Jerusalem, that is, they aided and abetted her spiritual unfaithfulness to God in their support of worship of Roman idols, and more significantly so, her persecutions of God's saints. That the kings of the land were kings in Judea is seen in Ac. 4.24-28, when Peter and John had been released from their first imprisonment, they assembled with other Christians and prayed for God to notice their afflicters:

> 24 And they, when they heard it, lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, O Lord, thou that didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is: 25 who by the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David thy servant, didst say, Why

> did the Gentiles rage, And the peoples imagine vain things? 26 The *kings of the earth* set themselves in array, And the *rulers* were gathered together, Against the Lord, and against his Anointed: 27 for of a truth in this city against thy holy Servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, were gathered together, 28 to do whatsoever thy hand and thy council foreordained to come to pass.

Notice that the *kings of the land* of v26 were identified in v27 as Herod and Pontius Pilate, both political figures in Judea, the land of Palestine. They had drunk the wine of Judea's fornication by sanctioning Jerusalem's persecution of God's saints.

17:3 And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness: and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet-colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

John says he was carried away in the Spirit which implies that what he's seeing and writing is under the control and inspiration of the Spirit.

We've seen this beast with seven heads and ten horns before in chapter 13, where we identified it as the Roman empire; it is scarlet-colored because it's serving the red dragon, Satan. This beast is now carrying a harlot all decked out, and carrying a fancy goblet full of her abominations, the blood of the saints she had killed. She's audacious and is blaspheming, reviling, God, Christ, and their saints.

17:4 And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stone and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations, even the unclean things of her fornication,

And now John sees the harlot's identity. In the next chapter, when this harlot is destroyed, we'll see how the merchants of the land mourned her passing because of the tremendous economic business that passed with her. Jerusalem had this power because she sat at an important economic hub of the known world, connecting trade routes from Europe, Africa, India, and Asia. Also, because of all the travel routes that brought Jews by the millions to the temple several times a year with their attendant economic activity. The temple, one of the wonders of the known world, brought tremendous economic activity to the city, including its construction and maintenance.

17:5 and upon her forehead a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH (Gr. *ge*, land).

"Mystery" tells us that the harlot's name is not Babylon literally, but spiritually. She's a spiritual Babylon and a religious harlot, as she's drunken with the blood of Old Testament saints (the prophets slain by Jerusalem, as Jesus charged in Mt. 23.29-36), and the martyrs of Jesus—New Testament saints. She's the mother of harlots. Jerusalem was a harlot for centuries before Rome ever came into existence (Ezek. 16.2, 15, 33), so Rome's certainly not this harlot. Among those martyrs (witnesses) were the apostles, the principal witnesses of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Who killed the apostles? Jerusalem, the great city, God's wife, and she's drinking the blood of the martyrs of Christ, God's children, and she had already killed God's son. Recall Paul's statement to the Thessalonians about their Jewish persecutors in I Thes. 2.14-16:

> 14 For ye, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judaea in Christ Jesus: for ye also suffered the same things of your own countrymen, even as they did of the Jews; 15 who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove out us, and pleased not God, and are contrary to all men; 16 forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved; to fill up their sins always: but the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

Because of all the blood that Jerusalem has shed—Old Testament prophets, Jesus, his apostles, and his saints—Paul says the wrath of God has come upon them to the uttermost, their very end (Gr. *telos*). The end of Old Covenant Israel was foretold as early as Dt. 32.20, from the beginning of the nation.

17:6 And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I wondered with a great wonder.

John's reaction to seeing this harlot was amazement and astonishment. How could the city of God fall so far? How did the faithful city become a harlot?

17:7 And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou wonder? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and the ten horns.

Then the angel asks John why he should wonder at the sight of this harlot woman who's riding on the back of the beast, showing that she's supported and carried about by the Roman beast.

17:8 The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss, and to go into perdition. And they that dwell on the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **shall wonder, they whose name hath not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast, how that he was, and is not, and shall come.**

We'll specifically identify this beast who was, is not, and will be in verse 10, but for now, given the information that we have so far, we'll continue to say that this beast is still the Roman empire. However, this will have to change.

The land-dwellers, whose names are not in the book of life, are those who give allegiance to the beast. They are willing to worship the beast and his image.

17:9 Here is the mind that hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth:

Now the angel tells John that the seven heads on the beast are seven mountains. It's customary to point out that both Rome and Jerusalem were cities built on seven hills, and that's true, but notice what the angel also says about the seven heads in the next verse. Of course, the harlot riding on the beast is Jerusalem.

17:10 and they are seven kings; the five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a little while.

These seven hills are also seven kings, five in the past, one at present, and another king which is still in the future. Now notice how the description of the beast changes.

17:11 And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven; and he goeth into perdition.

Now the angel is equating the kings with the beast, which is appropriate for an empire. The emperor stands for the empire. The first seven kings are now gone, and the eighth king himself is now the

beast. The beast that started out as an empire is now a man, the eighth king.

Since we started out considering the beast as the Roman empire, we notice that the first six emperors of Rome were Julius Caesar (49-44 BC, assassinated in the Senate), Augustus Caesar (31 BC-14 AD), Tiberius Caesar (14-37), Gaius or Caligula (37-41), Claudius (41-54), and Nero (54-68) (These emperors are listed in Appendix 5, "The Timeline of Roman Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem." Nero was the sixth, the "one is" of v10. Nero committed suicide on June 9th, 68 AD. He had made such a mess in the empire that the Senate had decided he had to be removed, and Nero saved them the trouble. This tells us that Revelation was written before June 9th, 68 AD. On his death, chaos overtook the empire, with the next three emperors (Galba, Otho, and Vitellius) reigning only 19 months total. In historical circles, 69 AD is known as "the year of four emperors"! During this time, it looked like Rome was going to die, too. The next real (and seventh) emperor was Vespasian (69-79), and the one who "is not" was the eighth. Nero had sent Vespasian as his general to quell disturbances in Palestine, and during the chaos in Rome following Nero's death, he left Palestine and returned to Rome, leaving his son Titus (who would succeed his father as emperor, the eighth, 79-81) as commanding general in Palestine, to restore order in Jerusalem. Titus had not become emperor (the eighth) when John wrote.

Titus's going into perdition may not have been speaking of his own personal perdition, or ruin, but the fact that after the break in the war when Titus took over the war, he was going to continue the ruin of Jerusalem begun by his father, Vespasian. If it was speaking of his personal ruin, it was likely his death, only two years after the death of his father, due to fever.

17:12 And the ten horns that thou sawest are ten kings, who have received no kingdom as yet; but they receive authority as kings, with the beast, for one hour.

These kings are not independent sovereigns, but vassals under Nero. They only rule a short time, as they don't have much power. I take these kings to be rulers of the land of Israel, like the Herods or Pontius Pilate, as we discussed in v2.

17:13 These have one mind, and they give their power and authority unto the beast.

These vassal kings are of one mind; the policy they're united on it is whatever the beast, or Nero, wants.

17:14 These shall war against the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings; and they also shall overcome that are with him, called and chosen and faithful.

So the beast, Nero, and all his vassal kings oppose the lamb, and go along with worshipping the image of the beast. They also don't oppose the harlot's slaying the saints of Christ. Thus, they're warring against the Lamb and they're going to be defeated by him and those who are on his side. Back in 13.3-4, when we saw the beast with the mortal wound revive, everyone marveled, worshipped the beast, and boasted, saying: "Who is like unto the beast? And who is able to war with him?" That question has now been answered: the Lamb is able to war with him and the beast will be defeated.

His followers are called (they were called by the gospel, II Thes. 2.14), chosen (they're in Christ, those chosen for salvation by God before the foundation of the world, Eph. 1.4-5), and they're faithful even to the point of death. They're faithful as Jesus exhorted his saints in Mt. 24.13, "he that endureth to the end (in context, the end of the Mosaic age, when the harlot is destroyed) the same shall be saved."

This verse is Revelation in a nutshell. We've seen all the members on the teams in the conflict, and we've been told who's going to win, and how, so get on the right side!

17:15 And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the harlot sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.

The waters are all the people that the harlot influences and associates with, politically, religiously, or commercially, as we'll see momentarily.

17:16 And the ten horns which thou sawest, and the beast, these shall hate the harlot, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and shall burn her utterly with fire.

The ten vassal kings under Nero who rule near Jerusalem, the harlot, hate her, and they'll help the beast make her desolate and naked, and they will burn her utterly with fire. Nero sent his general Vespasian to stabilize Jerusalem in April 67, and Vespasian's son Titus will finally (although he didn't want to), burn Jerusalem to utter destruction. We'll have more to say about Jerusalem's fiery judgment in 18.8 and 20.10.

In Mt. 22.2-7, Jesus foretold the destruction of Jerusalem in the parable of the wedding feast:

> 2 The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son, 3 and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast: and they would not come. 4 Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them that are bidden, Behold, I have made ready my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come to the marriage feast. 5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise; 6 and the rest laid hold on his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7 *But the king was wroth; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.*

Is this not exactly what happened to Jerusalem? Christ invited the Jews to come to his wedding feast and sent them the wedding invitations by his apostles and disciples. The Jews abused the apostles and disciples and made martyrs of them. So the king sent his armies, under Vespasian and Titus, and "destroyed those murderers, and burned their city," and as we'll see in Rev. 19.7, went right on with the wedding feast!

How poignant are the words of Jeremiah (in 4.30-31) in view of Old Covenant Jerusalem's destruction by Babylon in 586 BC now that she has become the harlot Babylon herself and faces destruction by Rome:

> 30 And you, O desolate one, what will you do?
> Although you dress in scarlet,
> Although you decorate yourself with ornaments of gold,
> Although you enlarge your eyes with paint,
> In vain you make yourself beautiful;
> Your lovers despise you;
> They seek your life.
> 31 For I heard a cry as of a woman in labor,
> The anguish as of one giving birth to her first child,
> The cry of the daughter of Zion gasping for breath,
> Stretching out her hands, saying,
> "Ah, woe is me, for I faint before murderers."

17:17 For God did put in their hearts to do his mind, and to come to one mind, and to give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished.

The beast, Nero, with his vassal kings, were united to do God's will and finish the mystery of 10.7 and fulfill everything God said would happen to Jerusalem. Likewise, Jesus had said in Lk. 21.22, that when his disciples saw Jerusalem encompassed with armies, "these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled." If you ask how God put it in their minds to accomplish his will with Jerusalem, I don't know in this specific instance, but in Nebuchadnezzar's time, God gave him dreams telling him what was going to happen.

God speaking to Nero and his vassal kings in dreams or visions may not be the way God communicated his will concerning Jerusalem to them, but it's a possibility worth considering.

Perhaps Nero, Vespasian, and Titus knew they were carrying out God's will, maybe not as clearly as Bible believers know it, but we'll see some evidence that they believed God was on their side. For now, though, notice how Assyria felt when God raised them up to carry the northern kingdom of Israel off into captivity in 722 BC. In Isa. 10.5-9, God said:

> 5 Woe to Assyria, *the rod of My anger*
> And the staff in whose hands is My indignation,
> 6 I send it against a godless nation (Israel—SGD)
> And commission it against the people of My fury
> To capture booty and to seize plunder,
> And to trample them down like mud in the streets.
> 7 *Yet it does not so intend*
> *Nor does it plan so in its heart,*
> But rather it is its purpose to destroy,
> And to cut off many nations.

To God, Assyria, the ruling world empire at the time, was just a tool in God's hand, like the ping pong paddle my mother spanked me with as a boy. God sent Assyria against a godless nation (his own people!) to give her a spanking. If you had asked the king of Assyria if he knew he was serving God, he would have denied it, but he was still in the service of God.

17:18 And the woman whom thou sawest is the great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land).

John closes this chapter by identifying the harlot as the great city, Jerusalem, the harlot whom Jesus said would be held responsible for all the blood of all the prophets, Old Testament saints, and Jesus and his martyrs in his generation. She reigned over the kings of the land of Israel. She had ruled over Palestine since the time of David.

As Jesus warned unfaithful Jews in Mt. 21.43, "...I say unto you, The kingdom (reign or rule) of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." The nation the kingdom would be given to would not be another physical nation, but a spiritual one, which we read of in I Pet. 2.9:

> But ye are a *elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation*, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

Now that we've identified the harlot, the next chapter will recount her destruction.

Chapter 18

The Fall of Babylon

After hearing the description of the harlot Babylon (Jerusalem, where the Lord was crucified, 11.8), and seeing why God's judgment was coming upon her, we now proceed to the judgment itself. Though imminent, it is so certain that it's spoken of proleptically, as having already happened.

18:1 After these things I saw another angel coming down out of heaven, having great authority; and the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **was lightened with his glory.**

In his vision, John saw another angel, a great authoritative one, coming down, and as he came, the land of Palestine was lit up with his glory.

18:2 And he cried with a mighty voice, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, and is become a habitation of demons, and a hold of every unclean spirit, and a hold of every unclean and hateful bird.

This angel announced that Babylon has fallen, and that Old Covenant Jerusalem, which had been the habitation of God, was now in ruins. It's now inhabited by demons, unclean spirits, and unclean and hateful birds. These birds would naturally have been vultures, unclean in themselves because of the carrion they feasted on. As Jesus had foretold in Mt. 24.28, "for where the carcase is, there will the vultures be gathered together." As Eph. 2.22 teaches, God's habitation now isn't in physical Jerusalem, but in New Jerusalem, the church, the messianic temple, or the body of his son, "in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit."

18:3 For by the wine of the wrath of her fornication all the nations are fallen; and the kings of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth** (Gr. *ge*, land) **waxed rich by the power of her wantonness.**

For their association and fellowship with the harlot, her surrounding nations in Palestine and their vassal kings, also fall. Likewise, the merchants of the land who got rich off the harlot's opulence and decadence are suffering great loss, as we'll see in their lamentations in the remainder of this chapter.

18:4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come forth, my people, out of her, that ye have no fellowship with her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues:

John hears another heavenly voice telling God's people to get out of Babylon to avoid the judgment coming on her. Jesus had foretold this in Mt. 24.15-16:

> 15 When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand), 16 then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains:

18:5 for her sins have reached even unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.

When this voice mentions that Jerusalem's sins have reached even unto heaven, we're reminded of Jesus' words to the Jews in Mt. 23.31-32:

> 31 Wherefore ye witness to yourselves, that ye are sons of them that slew the prophets. 32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.

Forty years later, when the cup of God's wrath was full, and Jerusalem's guilt reached unto heaven, the time for judgment had come.

18:6 Render unto her even as she rendered, and double unto her the double according to her works: in the cup which she mingled, mingle unto her double.

In Mt.16.27-28, Jesus had foretold of his coming and judgment when he would render to every man according to his deeds, and that this coming and judgment would occur in the lifetime of some of his

disciples. Likewise, he had warned of his coming in Mt. 24.29, 34 in his generation, and the Jewish judgment of Matthew 25 would be at the same time. In Appendix 2, "Imminent Judgment in the Olivet Discourse," we see where Matthew 24 is in fulfillment of Joel 2, while Matthew 25 is in fulfillment of Joel 3, and Joel says the two chapters will be fulfilled at the same time.

It's easy to see why people question whether rendering to disobedient Jews was double what it should have been, when the heavenly voice says, "double unto her the double according to her works." Is that fair? Some scholars say this language is merely an oriental figure of speech like "and eye for an eye," whereby two eyes are put out, one of the victim, and one of the perpetrator. That may be true. It may also be another case like in the Mosaic code where if one stole a sheep and got caught on the property, he had to pay back one sheep, but if he made it off the property and sold it, he had to pay back two (Ex. 24.4, 7). The more the involvement in sin, the more the punishment would be. Of course, the Jews were quite involved in the sin of producing martyrs. They killed them, their ancestors killed them, and they decorated and honored their ancestors' graves.

At any rate, the judgment on the harlot was just, as all the witnesses will attest, as we see in the next verse.

18:7 How much soever she glorified herself, and waxed wanton, so much give her of torment and mourning: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall in no wise see mourning.

"How much...so much" expresses this just judgment. However much the harlot sinned, she was to be given a certain amount of torment and mourning and no more.

When she's judged, Jerusalem will assure herself that she's still a queen, still God's wife, still in covenant relationship with him, will never be a widow and see mourning, even though the whole city with its temple has come down around her ears—temple, priesthood, sacrificial system, and all.

Compare this record of Jerusalem's boastful attitude with Isa. 47.5-10, where ancient Babylon had the same cocky attitude:

> 5 Sit silently, and go into darkness,
> O daughter of the Chaldeans;
> For you will no more be called
> The queen of kingdoms.
> 6 I was angry with My people,
> I profaned My heritage,

> And gave them into your hand.
> 7 Yet you said, I shall be a queen forever.
> These things you did not consider,
> Nor remember the outcome of them.
> 8 Now, then, hear this, you sensual one,
> Who dwells securely,
> Who says in your heart,
> I am, and there is no one besides me.

The conceit of Jerusalem in the first century was the same as her ancient namesake, yet she went down just exactly as her ancient enemy had done.

18:8 Therefore in one day shall her plagues come, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire; for strong is the Lord God who judged her.

The one day of death, mourning, and famine is likely the day of the Lord, and the day Jerusalem was utterly burned with fire is the great day of the wrath of God Almighty. John the Baptist had warned of a judgment of unquenchable fire coming on Old Covenant Israel in Mt. 3.10-12. Recall in 9.15 that the judgment coming on Jerusalem was orchestrated to the hour, day, month, and year. It was Jerusalem's appointed time. In Mt. 24.34-35, Jesus said Jerusalem's end would come in his generation, but he denied knowing the day or the hour. A generation later, their day and hour had come.

In Mt. 24.16-18, he had also said that the destruction would come upon Jerusalem suddenly when they saw certain behavior from the Romans:

> 16 then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains: 17 let him that is on the housetop not go down to take out things that are in his house: 18 and let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak.

Interestingly, Titus didn't want to burn the city, and especially not the temple. He made a speech from the temple wall pleading with the Jews to surrender so he didn't have to damage the temple. When someone set fire to an area inside the temple, the conflagration went out of control, and melted a lot of the gold in the temple, causing it to run into the joints between the stones of the temple. The reason that there was not left one stone upon another was because the soldiers then

dismantled the temple stone by stone to recover the gold that had accumulated there.

Jerusalem's being utterly burned with fire is something we saw in 17.16. John the Baptist and Jesus had specifically warned of this fiery judgment, and we now wish to note their teaching in detail. In Mt. 3.10-12, John said:

> 10 And even now the axe lieth at the root of the trees: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the *fire*. 11 I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and (in) *fire*: 12 whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor; and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with *unquenchable fire*.

In Mk. 9.43, Jesus also spoke of *unquenchable fire* coming on Jerusalem:

> And if thy hand cause thee to stumble, cut it off: it is good for thee to enter into life maimed, rather than having thy two hands to go into *hell, into the unquenchable fire*.

Actually, Jesus didn't say the word "hell," but Gehenna, a proper noun which didn't need to be translated, any more than the words proper nouns Jerusalem or Bethlehem did. Gehenna was a historic valley on the south side of Jerusalem, as seen in the following photograph. When Titus destroyed Jerusalem, most of the debris of the city was scraped off into Gehenna. Thayer defines Gehenna properly as:

> Gehenna, the name of a valley on the south and east of Jerusalem. (Joseph Henry Thayer D. D., *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. p. 111.)

It's popularly believed that Gehenna is hell which is generally considered eternal conscious torment in the spiritual realm, yet hell is not a translation of Gehenna, but a subtitution for it. *Young's Literal Translation* renders it Gehenna. Jesus didn't say hell or intimate anything about eternal conscious torment in the spiritual realm in any of the 11 times he used the word in the New Testament. He threatened un-

quenchable fire in Gehenna, which is exactly what happened with Jerusalem. It was an unstoppable fiery judgment.

Gehenna

Such judgments have occurred many times in the Bible. For example, in Isa. 34.10, God spoke of unquenchable fire on *Edom*. In Isa. 66.24, he spoke of unquenchable fire on *Old Covenant Jerusalem*. In Jer. 7.20 and 17.27, we read of unquenchable fire on *Judah*. In Ezek. 20.47, 48 we see unquenchable fire on the *forest of the Negev*. If unquenchable fire on Edom, Old Covenant Jerusalem, Judah, and the Negev were all national judgments, why would unquenchable fire on Gehenna not be the same thing? That was the only way the Jews had ever heard the expression used! In Mt. 23.33, 36, Jesus said:

> 33 Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell (lit., Gehenna)?...Verily I say unto you, *All these things* shall come upon *this generation*.

Not only would his generation see their fiery judgment in Gehenna, they would also see it *in their generation*! In Mt. 24.34, Jesus said:

> Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished.

Thus, Jesus said that the fiery judgment coming on Gehenna would occur in his generation, and of course, his prophecy was fulfilled completely. (For a complete treatment of this topic, please see Chapter 14, "Jesus' Teaching on Hell" in the author's *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things*, available at Amazon.com. For a brief discussion of translating Gehenna with hell is found in Appendix 7, "Analysis of the Gehenna Passages."

We'll have more to say about Jerusalem's fiery judgment at 20.10.18:9 And the kings of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**, who committed fornication and lived wantonly with her, shall weep and wail over her, when they look upon the smoke of her burning,**

In 1.7, Jesus had spoken of his coming judgment and the wailing it would produce:

> Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him; and *all the tribes of the earth* (Gr. *ge*, land) *shall mourn over him.*

Notice the comments from Josephus on the burning of the temple:

> WHILE the holy house was on fire, every thing was plundered that came to hand, and ten thousand of those that were caught were slain; nor was there a commiseration of any age, or any reverence of gravity, but children, and old men, and profane persons, and priests were all slain in the same manner; so that this war went round all sorts of men, and brought them to destruction, and as well those that made supplication for their lives, as those that defended themselves by fighting. The flame was also carried a long way, and made an echo, together with the groans of those that were slain; and because this hill was high, and the works at the temple were very great, one would have thought the whole city had been on fire. Nor can one imagine any thing either greater or more terrible than this noise; for there was at once a shout of the Roman legions, who were marching all together, and a sad clamor of the seditious, who were now surrounded with fire and sword. The people also that were left above were beaten back upon the enemy, and under a great consternation, and made sad moans at the calam-

> ity they were under; the multitude also that was in the city joined in this outcry with those that were upon the hill. And besides, many of those that were worn away by the famine, and their mouths almost closed, when they saw the fire of the holy house, they exerted their utmost strength, and brake out into groans and outcries again: Perea did also return the echo, as well as the mountains round about [the city,] and augmented the force of the entire noise. Yet was the misery itself more terrible than this disorder; for one would have thought that the hill itself, on which the temple stood, was seething hot, as full of fire on every part of it, that the blood was larger in quantity than the fire, and those that were slain more in number than those that slew them; for the ground did no where appear visible, for the dead bodies that lay on it; but the soldiers went over heaps of those bodies, as they ran upon such as fled from them. (*Wars*, 6, 5, 1)

John mentions three groups of people who will mourn Jerusalem's passing, the kings of the land, the merchants of the land, and the mariners. First, the (puppet) kings of the land who were involved in Jerusalem's sins and profited from them will weep and wail over her burning.

18:10 standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.

Are these kings who stand afar off afraid that they might be caught up in the destruction, or because they were afraid to help, or for some other reason? I don't know, but I do know they didn't want to get too close to the action. As we would say now, they didn't want to get fragged.

The judgment coming in one hour reminds us of I Jn. 2.18, where John wrote:

> Little children, it is the last hour: and as ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour.

The last hour wasn't the end of history or the end of time, a term which never occurs in scripture. It couldn't have been the end of the age of Christ, because it explicitly has no end (Isa. 9.6, 7, Lk. 1.33), so

it has no last days, last day, or last hour. However, the Mosaic age had all of those, and it's to that hour John refers in both I John 2 and Revelation 18.

18:11 And the merchants of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **weep and mourn over her, for no man buyeth their merchandise any more;**

The second group whose reaction we hear about is the merchants of the land. Because of the location of the temple, the merchants all along the travel routes the Jews took to Jerusalem three times a year did tremendous business. Just notice the fifteen countries represented in Jerusalem in Ac. 2.9-11. With the temple gone, their market vanished overnight. Of course, they would weep and mourn over Jerusalem's destruction. It cost them dearly. In Ezekiel 27.12-36, we read of the same reaction of the merchants who did business with Tyre when it was destroyed centuries before. It was a seaport for Jerusalem. In the next verse, the merchandise that harlot city traded in will be described.

Josephus numbered the huge influx of people and trade because of the presence of the temple at three million during the Passover.

18:12 merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stone, and pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet; and all thyine wood, and every vessel of ivory, and every vessel made of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble;

Thyine wood was valuable and used in making fine furniture.

18:13 and cinnamon, and spice, and incense, and ointment, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and cattle, and sheep; and merchandise of horses and chariots and slaves; and souls of men.

The Jews were located at the hub for many travel routes from Europe to Africa, and even India and Persia. In Ezek. 5.5, God said that he had placed Jerusalem at the center of the nations. After listing all the luxurious items they bought and sold because of the presence of the temple, also mentioned are slaves (that doubtlessly passed through the area) and the souls or lives of men. Because of their association with Jerusalem, when it fell, 1.1 million souls or lives of men were taken, and 97,000 Jews were taken alive into slavery.

18:14 And the fruits which thy soul lusted after are gone from thee, and all things that were dainty and sumptuous are perished from thee, and men shall find them no more at all.

So everything everyone wanted that Jerusalem traded in is going to be gone. The temple is gone, the populace is gone, the market is gone, all the sumptuous products are gone, and all the merchants are going to be gone.

18:15 The merchants of these things, who were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning;

18:16 saying, Woe, woe, the great city, she that was arrayed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stone and pearl!

We now see a third group of people who are going to be mourning Jerusalem's passing, the merchant marine! Shipmasters and sailors who brought produce to Israel's ports are all going to suffer great financial losses. Note Josephus' comments about the benefits of maritime trade to Jerusalem:

> Nor indeed is Judea destitute of such delights as come from the sea, since its maritime places extend as far as Ptolemais: it was parted into eleven portions, of which the royal city Jerusalem was the supreme, and presided over all the neighboring country, as the head does over the body. (*Wars*, 3, 3, 5)

18:17 for in an hour so great riches is made desolate. And every shipmaster, and every one that saileth any wither, and mariners, and as many as gain their living by sea, stood afar off,

18:18 and cried out as they looked upon the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like the great city?

If some small town like Bethlehem had fallen, it wouldn't have been a big deal, and there were scores of small towns in the land that had fallen. Jotapota where Josephus had to surrender, is an example. No one even remembers Jotapota. Not a big deal. But the great city falling—the center of the kings, merchants, and mariners of the land—there was no other city like Jerusalem!

18:19 And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and mourning, saying, Woe, woe, the great city, wherein all that had their ships in the sea were made rich by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.

So they're all going to be mourning Jerusalem's fall, yet there's another group that's not going to be mourning: those in heaven, the martyred prophets, apostles, and saints. If the great harlot city isn't Jerusalem, then Jesus had it wrong because he foretold that Jerusalem was responsible for all the blood of all the prophets, and that he was going to avenge their blood in his generation (Mt. 23.29-36).

18:20 Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye saints, and ye apostles, and ye prophets; for God hath judged your judgment on her.

They're rejoicing. If they complained before, in 6.9-11, they're not complaining now. They're also not complaining that God was too harsh; now they're rejoicing at God's righteous judgment. He's finally avenged all their blood.

18:21 And a strong angel took up a stone as it were a great millstone and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with a mighty fall shall Babylon, the great city, be cast down, and shall be found no more at all.

So like a great millstone falling into the water, Jerusalem's going down! There's a city called Jerusalem there now, but it's not the great city of God, and there's no temple there to bring in the hordes of Jews three times a year.

18:22 And the voice of harpers and minstrels and flute-players and trumpeters shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft, shall be found any more at all in thee; and the voice of a mill shall be heard no more at all in thee;

With Jerusalem's fall, there isn't going to be any occasion of joy, no parties needing musicians, no celebrations, no weddings, etc. There's also going to be no more industry, no mills, and no craftsmen to maintain the temple as in the past.

18:23 and the light of a lamp shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the princes of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**; for with thy sorcery were all the nations deceived.**

There's also going to be no more lights shining at night, and no more weddings. All the kings, all the merchants, all the craftsmen, all the customers—they're all gone. In modern language, we'd say that God punched their lights out! He had promised to do so in Mt. 24.29:

> But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

It was truly the darkest day in the history of Israel.

18:24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that have been slain upon the earth (Gr. *ge*, land).

The reason for Jerusalem's destruction is given again: to avenge the blood of all the martyrs that have been slain (Gr. slaughtered, as an animal) who loved not their life even unto death. Rome wasn't destroyed for the blood of Christ, his apostles, the prophets, and the Old and New Covenant saints—Jerusalem was.

Chapter 19

Christ's Victory Over All Foes

After describing the destruction of Jerusalem and the reaction of the kings, merchants, and mariners of the land, John now sees the reaction of heaven.

19:1 After these things I heard as it were a great voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, Hallelujah; Salvation, and glory, and power, belong to our God:

Again, we have a scene of all heaven praising God for his victory over the harlot. Hallelujah means "praise God," and that's what all of heaven is doing, praising him for his avenging the blood of all the martyrs from Abel through Christ and his saints. This is the theme of Revelation, and as we saw in the introductory chapter to this book, it's also the theme of the entire Bible.

19:2 for true and righteous are his judgments; for he hath judged the great harlot, her that corrupted the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **with her fornication, and he hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.**

The words avenge and vengeance come from a compound word e*k-dike,* where *dike* is justice, and *ek* is a preposition meaning "out of." Hence, vengeance is "out of justice," that is, it proceeds out of justice. Justice demands it. Sometimes we believe vengeance is an evil concept, but it's no more evil than justice is. Justice demanded it, as it demanded it in every case of martyrdom from Abel onward.

19:3 And a second time they say, Hallelujah. And her smoke goeth up for ever and ever.

As this heavenly throng continues to praise God, Jerusalem's smoke continues to rise. Since it rises forever and ever, do you suppose

it's still rising the day you're reading this page? Not at all. In Isa. 34.9, 10, we see similar language after God judged Edom using Babylon:

> 9 And its streams shall be turned into pitch,
> And its loose earth into brimstone,
> And its land shall become burning pitch.
> 10 *It shall not be quenched night or day;*
> *Its smoke shall go up forever*;
> From generation to generation it shall be desolate;
> None shall pass through it *forever and ever*.

If you go today to Jordan, where ancient Edom used to be, you won't see any still-burning pitch, or any still-rising smoke from Babylon's conquest of her. Does that mean the Bible is mistaken? Not at all, because the word translated forever is *aionios*, which means *age-lasting*, not unending or eternal. The pitch burned and the smoke rose for an appropriate age, until Edom was gone.

The same thing is true of Jerusalem. When the Romans got through with her, her smoke rose throughout the appropriate age, the Mosaic age, which ended when Jerusalem was destroyed.

19:4 And the four and twenty elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God that sitteth on the throne, saying, Amen; Hallelujah.

We've seen the four living creatures—cherubim that we first see guarding the Garden of Eden after the ejection of Adam and Eve, and the twenty-four elders, which we supposed represented the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles, since their introduction in Revelation 4. They're also praising God for his righteous judgment and saying "Amen" to it or "That's the way that it is!" The cherubim were extraordinarily powerful spiritual beings who carried out God's judgments throughout the Bible. They've seen it all since Eden! At the conclusion of Revelation, the cherubim are going to be gone because their work is finished, as they won't be needed to guard the tree of life any longer.

19:5 And a voice came forth from the throne, saying, Give praise to our God, all ye his servants, ye that fear him, the small and the great.

Given that Jerusalem was destroyed to avenge the blood of all the martyrs, do you get the impression that the church, the body of Christ, the collection of everyone who's in God's register as being in fellow-

ship with him, is important? Or is it just something nice to be in if you want to, but it's not necessary. As dispensationalists teach, the church is just something God never foretold in the Old Testament, a "Plan B" God came up with when the Jews rejected Christ's kingdom. No, the church, the body of Christ, is so important that God planned it before the foundation of the world, directed the events of history throughout the Old Testament period of time to bring it to fruition, had Christ pay the ultimate price to purchase it with his blood, and when Old Covenant Jerusalem threatened it, destroyed her. Now those purchased by Christ's sacrifice and butchered for their faith are praising God for what he's done for them.

19:6 And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah: for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth.

John again hears the voice of a heavenly multitude like the voice of Niagara Falls. If you've been there, you've felt the ground shake at the energy on display, and you know it's nothing you want to horse around with. They're praising God for his just reign over the kings of the land.

19:7 Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

They now rejoice for another reason, now that the harlot has been destroyed. When she was faithful to God, she had been God's wife, but now the Lamb is going to have a new wife, and she's dressed and ready for the occasion.

19:8 And it was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

You can just imagine how this woman is adjusting her wedding garments, and preening every detail of her appearance. We know that most weddings start a little late. It's generally not the preacher's fault: he's always prepared and on time. It's generally not the groom's fault, either. He's there on time and pacing up and down nervously. Weddings also generally start a little late because the bride's fussing and making her final preparations. As we've seen, this bride's wedding garments are the righteous acts of the saints, because the Lamb's wife consists of all his faithful saints, and it's time for the wedding to take place.

Sadly, most people think this wedding hasn't taken place yet, and they think it will take place in the future. Christians in the first century saw it in their day. The bride was ready after the harlot was out of the way, and she's not been preening for 2000 years.

19:9 And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they that are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are true words of God.

To appreciate what's happening with this wedding, notice Jesus' parable of the wedding feast in Mt. 22.1-10:

> 1 And Jesus answered and spake again in parables unto them, saying, 2 The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son, 3 and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast: and they would not come. 4 Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them that are bidden, Behold, I have made ready my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come to the marriage feast. 5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise; 6 and the rest laid hold on his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7 *But the king was wroth; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.*

When Jesus came to earth, he invited the Old Covenant Jews to his wedding feast, and they refused him. He sent other servants, the apostles, to invite them. They beat his servants and killed them. What did Christ do then? "He was wroth, and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city."

Continuing in Mt. 22.8-10, Jesus said:

> 8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy. 9 Go ye therefore unto the partings of the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage feast. 10 And those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and *the wedding was filled with guests.*

After the king burned their city, what did he do? He went right on with the marriage feast. The refusal of the Jews to accept the messiah affected his plan not one whit.

What has Jesus just done in Revelation? He has invited the Jews into his kingdom during his earthly ministry, and they in large part rejected him, and the apostles whom he sent with the same invitation. He burned their city in Revelation 18, and now what's happening in Revelation 19? He's going right on with the wedding. Again, his plan hasn't changed one whit!

Why do most people believe Christ has not married his bride, the body of Christ, his church? It's because of a misconception of the word "betrothed" in the Bible. In modern times we use the term "betrothed" to mean engaged. We see it so used on the society page of the Sunday paper every week. It means that a couple has made a covenant or agreement to become husband and wife at some later time. However, in the Old Testament betrothed people weren't just engaged to be married; they were husband and wife. They had made a covenant or agreement to live together as husband and wife. In Dt. 22.22-24, we read:

> If a man is found lying with a married woman, then both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman: thus you shall purge the evil from Israel. If there is a girl who is a virgin engaged [ASV—*betrothed*] to a man, and another man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death: the girl, because she did not cry out in the city, and the man, because *he has violated his neighbor's wife*. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you.

Notice that a man who violates a betrothed virgin has violated his neighbor's wife, not his neighbor's fiancé. Since she was a virgin and a wife, cohabitation wasn't necessary to make her a wife. Cohabitation didn't "consummate" their marriage, for she was already a wife. To see this even further, consider the difference in penalties between violating a betrothed virgin and an unbetrothed one. In Dt. 22.28-29, we read:

> If a man finds a girl who is a virgin who is not engaged [ASV—betrothed], and seizes her and lies with her and they are discovered, then the man who lay

> with her shall give to the girl's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall become his wife because he has violated her; he cannot divorce her all his days.

Sometimes we hear preachers say that there was no distinction between fornication and adultery in the Old Testament. Here, at least, we see some differences. Fornication with an unbetrothed virgin was punishable by (1) paying a fine, (2) marrying the woman, and (3) never divorcing her. Adultery with a betrothed virgin was punishable by death since a man's wife had been violated. If we can understand the difference between the death penalty and a fine, we can understand the difference between unbetrothed and betrothed virgins. Again, cohabitation wasn't necessary to make her a wife; she was one already by the fact that she was betrothed.

Customarily under the Mosaic law, a couple would be betrothed, that is, they would make a marriage covenant, then they would wait for a year before having a wedding feast, after which they would begin living together as man and wife. If a betrothed man and woman came together before the marriage feast, it would not be fornication, but in violation of a society norm. It would not be a sin.

The Case of Joseph and Mary

In Mt. 1.18, we read the account of Joseph and Mary, who were faithful Jews living under Dt. 22.22-29:

> Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.

So, Joseph and Mary were betrothed, they were husband and wife, not fiancés, and she was a virgin, because they had not come together. They wouldn't have been any more married if they'd been husband and wife for forty years and had forty children! Indeed, cohabitation wasn't necessary for them to be husband and wife. In verse 19, we have:

> And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to *put her away* privily.

Notice that Joseph is identified as her husband. The word "put away" is the standard word for divorce and is the same word Jesus used in Mt. 19.9, when he said, "Whosoever shall *put away* his wife." Although they had not cohabited, they were so married that he was going to divorce her, something not done with fiancés. Joseph would certainly have been a troubled young man. He loved this woman; they were married, and according to Jewish tradition, they wouldn't live together until after the marriage feast. All of a sudden, he found out that she was pregnant, and he knew he hadn't had relations with her. In his mind, he suspected she had been unfaithful to him, so he wanted to get away from her. Interestingly, Matthew said he was a "righteous man" in so doing, but rather than making her a public spectacle, he wanted to do it privily, literally "on the side."

We continue reading in verse 20:

> But when he thought on these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee *Mary thy wife*, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, the angel recognized that Mary was his wife, not his fiancée, and that cohabitation wasn't necessary to "consummate" the marriage. This is Roman Catholic lingo, not Bible lingo.

Concluding this account, we read in verse 24:

> And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and *took unto him his wife*.

For the third time, Matthew said that Mary was his wife, not his fiancée; thus, this virgin woman, who knew not a man, was married.

In II Cor. 11.2, Paul said:

> For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: for I *espoused* you to one husband that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

The NASB uses "betrothed" for espoused. The NIV uses "promised," which is especially weak. Joseph and Mary weren't "promised"; they were so married that Joseph contemplated divorcing her.

In Revelation, Jesus and his church are married; she is called his wife, just like Mary is called Joseph's wife, but they hadn't had the marriage feast yet.

19:10 And I fell down before his feet to worship him. And he saith unto me, See thou do it not: I am a fellow-servant with thee and with thy brethren that hold the testimony of Jesus: worship God; for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

The angel, being a created being (Ps. 148.2, 5), refused John's worship, and tells him to stop it, as he's a fellow-servant, and tells him to worship God.

The testimony of Jesus is what Jesus taught while he was on earth and what had been revealed through his apostles through the Spirit, so it was the spirit of prophecy, that is, the Spirit who had revealed the truth of God through the prophets of old. He had taught nothing out of accord with the Spirit's work in the Old Covenant or the New.

19:11 And I saw the heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon called Faithful and True; and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

We've seen Christ or a representative of his on a white horse before, but here the rider is called Faithful and True. This certainly fits Christ as the faithful witness of God, and he's True because he never taught anything but the truth. He's also the righteous judge and the one that's making war against Satan and his entire team, Satan himself, the two beasts, and the harlot whom he's just warred against and destroyed.

19:12 And his eyes are a flame of fire, and upon his head are many diadems; and he hath a name written which no one knoweth but he himself.

We saw Christ's penetrating eyes before and his many royal crowns or diadems. Since his resurrection, he's had all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28.18), and has a name that no one comprehends except he himself. This is because one's name stands for the totality of his being, and no one comprehends the totality of his being except himself alone. My name, Sam Dawson, stands in my place. It stands for the totality of my being, my character, my testimony, my duty, my accomplishments, everything about me. You know my name, how to pronounce it, how to spell it, but do you really know me? No one knows everything about me, but me. I know my strengths, weaknesses, my history, my foibles, my sins, my improper thoughts, every-

thing about me, and the same thing is true of you, and it's also true of Christ. He's deity, implying all the characteristics of a divine being. No one comprehends his name but Christ himself.

19:13 And he is arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

His name is called The Word of God. As in Jn. 1.1, 14, where John speaks of Christ as "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, the same was in the beginning with God...and the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us..." This is language which can only be applied to Christ, who didn't just bring the Word of God, he *was* the complete communication from God to man.

He's coming on his white horse as a victorious conqueror, and he has blood sprinkled on his garment. As we'll see shortly, this is the blood of his enemies, as he's been treading on them in the winepress.

We see the same picture in Isa. 63.1-4, speaking of God's judgment on Edom:

> 1 Who is this who comes from Edom,
> With garments of glowing colors from Bozrah,
> This One who is majestic in His apparel,
> Marching in the greatness of His strength?
> It is I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.
> 2 *Why is Your apparel red,*
> *And Your garments like the one who treads in the wine press?*
> 3 I have trodden the wine trough alone,
> And from the peoples there was no man with Me.
> *I also trod them in My anger*
> *And trampled them in My wrath;*
> *And their lifeblood is sprinkled on My garments,*
> And I stained all My raiment.
> 4 For the day of vengeance was in My heart...

This is exactly the same picture we have of Christ in Revelation.

19:14 And the armies which are in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and pure.

Christ's armies are with him on their white horses. This is somewhat like a Western movie, where the cavalry has whipped the Indians, and in the closing scene, the conquering cavalry officer rides up on his horse, all his troops on the bluff with him, and they ride off into the

victorious sunset. This is a scene of victory, and the movie is about over!

19:15 And out of his mouth proceedeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God, the Almighty.

This time, we see Christ with a broadsword, one wielded with both hands. Before, we've seen him with a smaller sword. With this sword, he directs the nations, and he rules them with a rod of iron, as was foretold by the prophets, as we've seen in the messianic Psalm 2.6-7. We've seen him wielding that sword and rod, as he exercises his rule over all the nations. The word translated "rule" here is *poimaino* which means "to tend as a shepherd." This is the word that is used of elders or bishops in a local church. The Latin word for shepherd is "pastor," which Jesus certainly is, but we generally hear *pastor* applied to preachers, not elders nor bishops. Why use a Latin word in an English translation? Why not a Hungarian word? It would make just as much sense.

19:16 And he hath on his garment and on his thigh a name written, KINGS OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

His messianic title—King of Kings and Lord of Lords is branded on his garment and thigh, names which we've seen since Revelation 1. He's the King that rules over all kings, and the Lord who rules over all lords. This world has seen lots of kings come and go. This king isn't going to go. His rule and the increase of his kingdom will never end (Isa. 9.6, 7, I Tim. 6.14-16). We'll now see his directive after he's destroyed the harlot city.

19:17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in mid heaven, Come and be gathered together unto the great supper of God;

This angel, as radiant as the sun in all its brightness, which no man can gaze upon, calls the vultures in the sky, inviting them to God's great supper. Notice what this supper consists of in the next verse, as he tells them to carry out their duty as vultures and clean up the mess of vanquished bodies of all his enemies.

19:18 that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and of them

that sit thereon, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, and small and great.

This angel is inviting the vultures to feast upon all of Christ's vanquished enemies: the flesh of the kings of the land, their horses— everyone in Satan's vanquished armies.

19:19 And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat upon the horse, and against his army.**

The last time we saw all these members of Satan's team, the beast was no longer the Roman empire, but one of its kings, Titus, who destroyed the temple and Jerusalem. Titus ruled as emperor only two years after the death of his father Vespasian, from 79-81 AD.

19:20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought the signs in his sight, wherewith he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast and them that worshipped his image: they two were cast alive into the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone:

So now, two individuals, the Roman beast, and the false prophet, Judaism, are cast into the lake of fire. They have been vanquished, and what's not eaten by the vultures is now cast into the trash, the incinerator.

Of course, it's customary to immediately assume the lake of fire to be the fires of hell. Consider whether this lake of fire is literal. Was Satan a literal dragon? Was the sea beast a literal beast? Was the land beast a literal beast? Was the mark of either of these beasts a literal mark? Was the harlot a literal woman all decked out in seductive garb? Was the Christ riding around on a literal white horse? Was the sword in his mouth a literal steel blade? Were the vultures literal? Was the winepress literal?

If we aren't willing to assume that any of these things in John's vision were literal, why would we assume the lake of fire is?

The word Gehenna, that we normally say is translated "hell," doesn't occur in Revelation, and actually, "hell," a place where it's said the lost are supposedly tormented eternally in fire, isn't a translation of Gehenna at all. Gehenna is the proper name of a valley on the south side of Jerusalem and didn't need to be translated (and it wasn't), any more than Jerusalem needed to be, nor Bethlehem. In the 16th Century, the Roman Catholic Church merely substituted the word "hell" for Gehenna. Hell is a Roman Catholic concept that carries many con-

notations of eternal torment that the word Gehenna has none of. For a brief study of the 12 Gehenna passages in the New Testament, see Appendix 7. For a thorough study of "Jesus' Teaching on Hell," please see Chapter 14 in the author's *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things*.

19:21 and the rest were killed with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, even the sword which came forth out of his mouth: and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

"The rest" are everyone on Satan's team (except Satan, as we'll see in the next chapter) that are killed by Christ's sword, and all the vultures were satiated with their flesh.

Chapter 20

The Destiny of Satan

We now come to a much-abused chapter, Revelation 20. When most people think of the book of Revelation, chapter 20 is the first thing that comes to mind, as though these verses were the only ones in the entire book.

A few of our comments will be related to the subject of premillennialism. It's customary to discuss how Revelation 20 isn't a prooftext for premillennialism, but we examine this subject in detail in Chapters 17-23, "The Faithless Foundation of Dispensational Premillennialism" in the author's *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things*. Premillennialists use Revelation 20 as the classic (although not the only) proof text of their theory, that Christ will come back before (pre-) he reigns on the earth for 1000 years (a millennium). Many books, movies, and even comic books depict the premillennial view of the second coming of Christ. As we will see, the subject of this passage is not the 1000 year reign of Christ, or even His return, but the *destiny of Satan*.

Context of Revelation 20

The difficulty of studying one of the last chapters of one of the more difficult books in the Bible by itself is obvious. John evidently saw this revelation as a series of visions, something like when we watch a movie. To study only the twentieth chapter would be like coming into a two-hour movie one and a half hours after it began. To just watch fifteen minutes and then try to grasp the full significance of that small segment would be difficult indeed. And so it is with Revelation 20. Thus, it is fortunate that we've developed the context of this chapter.

Context of Time

As we've seen, the general context begins in Rev. 1.1, where John made it clear that the Revelation is about "things which must shortly come to pass." Most people do not believe the events John described in Revelation would take place "shortly." They seem to think John wrote about things which would take place hundreds of years in the future, such as World War I, II, or III, which many theorize is Armageddon. But we must keep in mind John said, in the beginning of the book, that he would speak about things which *must shortly take place*.

Likewise, in Rev. 1.3, John said, "keep the things that are written therein: for the time is at hand." The time was at hand during the first century.

At the end of the book, in Rev. 22.6, John said he had spoken about "the things which must shortly come to pass." Also, in Rev. 22.10, he said the same thing:

> And he saith unto me, Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.

These statements of time in Revelation 20 are even more obvious when compared with contrasting language regarding Daniel's prophecy of the same events. For example, in Dan. 12.4, 9, Daniel, who had spoken about the persecution of Christians (Dan. 7.19-21), heard the Lord say (about 500 B.C.):

> But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time...Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time.

God sealed Daniel's prophesies because they were *far in the future* (in that case, nearly 600 years). In Revelation 20, however, Christ told John not to seal up his prophecies because the time was *at hand*. Yet, most people incorrectly view the statements in Revelation 20 as not fulfilled, nearly 2000 years after John made them.

Placed in the context of the entire book, Revelation 20 concerns the judgment of Satan. *Incidental to that*, the 1000 year reign of *someone* with Christ *somewhere* is mentioned. However, that *incidental mention* (three verses) is not the subject of the chapter. The subject of the chapter is the destiny of Satan!

Positive Viewpoint

Before we start a verse-by-verse study of Revelation 20, permit us to summarize briefly Rev. 19.11-21. After the destruction of the harlot city Jerusalem in chapter 18, the kings of the land of Israel were judged in 19.11-19, then the sea and land beasts were cast into a lake of fire in 19.20-21. The leader of this team, Satan, remained, whose destiny is the topic of Revelation 20, rather than the 1000 year reign of Christ. We begin with 20.1:

Verse 1: And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.

Who was this angel? Many think immediately that it is Jesus, although the text doesn't say so. Rather than a servant (as angels are), Revelation portrays Jesus as a ruler, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. Thus, it's not an inevitable conclusion that the angel was Jesus at all. We cannot just assume it. It should be an inescapable conclusion if we teach it dogmatically.

We should also realize that, in a study of the entire book of Revelation, we encountered several angels. Hardly anyone assumes that *any* of these angels is Christ.

For example, in Rev. 7.1, four angels held the four winds back from the judgment of the nation that persecuted Christians. No one assumes any one of these angels was Christ. Similarly, in Rev. 8.2, seven angels blow seven trumpets and no one identifies any of those angels as Christ. Likewise, Rev. 10.1, 2 contains the angel with the little book. Some might identify this angel as Christ, yet John did not do so, so it would thus seem an assumption which few seem tempted to make dogmatically.

I think there's good reason to believe that the angel is not Christ. John is foreseeing things which are still future to him, yet Christ had already bound Satan during his earthly ministry, as we're about to see in abundant detail.

The point is not that we know who this angel was, which isn't critical (or John would have told us), but that no reason exists to think this angel was Christ. Here was an angel, some servant of God, who came onto the scene with a great chain in his hand.

Verse 2: And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

This passage gives four titles to the devil: He's called a *dragon* because of his ferocious nature. He's called a *serpent* because he was cunning, deceiving, subtle, and sneaky. He's called the *Devil* because that was his job as the accuser and slanderer of humanity. Finally, John called him *Satan*, because he's an adversary or opponent.

In the late 1980's when Ayatollah Khomeini ruled Iran, Americans got incensed when Khomeini called the United States a "Great Satan." Yet, Khomeini used the word correctly. He did not identify America as the Satan of the Bible. He just said that America was his great adversary, which was true.

Next, we want to discuss a truth that this passage does not teach, though premillennialists universally think that it does. Although John is writing about things shortly to come to pass (in his time), the Bible teaches in no uncertain terms (as we shall immediately show) that, while Christ was on earth, he bound Satan. That was not something that was about to happen, it already had! That is not what this passage teaches. But, before we deal with what it does teach, let's demonstrate that Christ absolutely did bind Satan during his earthly ministry.

First, notice in I Jn. 3.8 that one of Christ's goals, when he came into the world the first time, was to destroy the works of Satan:

> To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

At the conclusion of Jesus' ministry on earth, the night before he died, Jesus believed that he had accomplished what he came to do. As he prayed to His Father in Jn. 17.4, he said:

> I glorified thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do.

As to whether or not Jesus accomplished the destruction of Satan's works, remember that Jesus said several times in the gospels that before he could destroy the works of Satan, he first had to bind him. In Mk. 3.27, Jesus said:

> But no one can enter into the house of the strong man, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house.

Jesus could not destroy the works of Satan till he first bound Satan. We notice the same teaching in Lk. 11.21-22 where Jesus said:

> When the strong man fully armed guardeth his own court, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and *overcome* him, he taketh from him his whole armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.

For now, just notice Jesus' use of the word "overcome." We have already noticed it many times in our study, how Jesus overcame Satan (12.11), and how Christians overcome him as well (Rev. 3.21), in exactly the same way. This is not new teaching in this book, it's a reminder! Daniel and his friends (Dan. 3.16-18), and Esther (Esth. 4.13-16) were Old Testament overcomers. Also, notice Jesus declared that Satan's spoils would not be divided until he was overcome.

In Jn. 12.31-33, just shortly before His death, Jesus said:

> Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself. But this he said, signifying by what manner of death he should die.

Jesus professed that, by His death, he would cast out the prince of this world. In death, he entered into the house of the strong man and cast him out, yet Jesus had already taught that he couldn't do that *unless he first bound the strong man*.

The passage that concludes this point is Col. 2.14-15, where Paul summarized what Christ did by His death:

> ...having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and he hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross; having *despoiled the principalities and the powers*, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Paul said that in His death Christ despoiled the powers of Satan. Christ had already said he couldn't do that unless he first bound Satan. Therefore, whether or not I understand how he did it, *if Paul and Christ were right*, Jesus bound Satan when he died.

Many will find this incredulous, exclaiming, "But so much evil occurs in the world! How can Christ have bound Satan?" Well, do all the enemies of Christ in the world today prove that Christ has not bound Satan and that Christ is not reigning? In Ps. 110.2, a messianic prophe-

cy, David prophesied that Christ would "rule in the midst of his enemies." The presence of sin and enemies of Christ doesn't disprove Christ's reign at all. It was foretold to be such a reign. Furthermore, in I Cor. 15.25, Paul said that Christ must reign "until he hath put all his enemies under his feet." Obviously, Paul thought "enemies" had to be present during the reign of Christ. Lastly on this point, in Ps. 47.8, 93.1, 96.10, 97.1, and Ps. 99.1, Old Testament psalmists said, in no uncertain terms, that God reigned. Yet, God had His enemies, and sin was rampant in the Old Testament period of time.

The term "bound" does not imply that Satan has no influence at all, nor that he cannot twitch a muscle. In Rev. 20.7, we will read that Satan was in prison. Can a person move around while in prison? Surely he can. Paul said a husband and wife are bound in marriage, but they're not vegetables, they may still exert considerable individual influence. In Ac. 28.30-31, the Romans bound Paul in prison, yet he still taught. Philemon 1 tells about a slave by the name of Onesimus whom Paul taught while bound!

The term "bound" simply doesn't mean that one cannot exercise any influence whatsoever, but merely that his activity and influence are restricted. Thus, Christ bound Satan, even though Peter said (I Pet. 5.8) Satan went around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he might devour. He'd been caged by Christ and, still, Christians couldn't take him casually. If they were deceived and tempted into his realm and were drawn away by their own lusts and enticed (Jas. 1.14), he could still destroy them. This does not deny that Christ destroyed the works of Satan since the crucifixion. Every Christian who is in fellowship with God through the blood of Christ is a despoiled work of Satan. He could not be in fellowship with God had not Christ entered into Satan's realm and bound him.

Having said that Christ bound Satan when he died, let us again repeat that this is not what John taught in Rev. 20.2. As we will shortly see, the gospels explain how Christ bound Satan. Revelation explains how Christians bound Satan.

As a matter of fact, hadn't faithful saints such as Daniel and his three friends (Dan. 3.16-18), Esther (Esth. 4.13-16), Stephen (Ac. 7.51ff), and others always overcome Satan the way Christ did, and the way faithful martyrs in Revelation had? They had done it at the same time the unfaithful caved in to persecution, both in the Old Covenant and in the new. Jesus had told his disciples that they had to love him more than their own lives (Lk. 14.26). Thus, the binding and overcoming of Satan by saints in Revelation was not revealing something new

to God's people, but reminding those undergoing tribulation that they could overcome Satan by holding fast to their faith, even to the point of death. We'll have more to say on the simultaneity of these two life-styles as we proceed in this chapter.

The term "1000 years" occurs in this verse, but we will wait to discuss it more fully after it occurs two more times.

Verse 3. And cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be finished; after this he must be loosed for a little time.

Daniel 6.17 well illustrates the idea of sealing, when King Nebuchadnezzar sealed the lion's den with a stone. Likewise, in Mt. 27.66, the Romans sealed the tomb of Jesus to prevent tampering with Jesus' body. So, here, the angel sealed Satan in this abyss, which was not the lake of fire (as we'll see later) but was Satan's domain, his prison, as this abyss (the same Greek word) will be called in verse 7.

John said that Satan was sealed that he might deceive the nations no more. First, this may be just saying that Satan cannot deceive overcomers like Daniel and his three friends, Esther, Stephen, first century martyrs, or those with the martyrs' spirit in any century, which is the position this author leans toward. Second, Satan had been deceiving nations like Babylon, Assyria, and Medo-Persia to get them to fight against God's people. In this chapter, these nations could well be the client nations that Rome used in the book of Revelation, as they are the closest nations in the context. This view is strengthened when we notice in v8 that these nations are "at the four corners of the land." They are the nations surrounding the land of Israel. When Christ judged the sea beast with its emperor worship, Rome's client nations were no longer deceived by emperor worship. In verse 8, Satan would be loosed and deceive the surrounding nations to gather them together to the war, of the great day of the wrath of God the Almighty.

On the other hand, this verse assured Christians that Satan couldn't get the nations into the same condition where he had them before Christ came. For instance, in Ac. 14.16, Paul told his listeners at Lystra that God had "suffered all the nations to go their own way." All of them had walked into Satan's camp. However, in Gen. 12.3, God didn't tell Abraham that through his seed (Christ, Gal. 3.16) all nations of the earth would be deceived, but that all nations would be blessed!

All nations are not now permitted to go their own way and Satan doesn't control them all. In Ac. 17.30, Paul preached that "The times

of ignorance therefore God overlooked; but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent." We'll have more to say on Satan's use of heathen nations in v8 when we discuss Gog and Magog.

Christ despoiled Satan's works by His death on the cross and never again would Satan get all the nations in his camp in the way that he did before the death of Christ. Never again would he have forces persecuting the church like Rome and Judaism did!

Before we start our comments on verses 4-6, we would like to note that these verses form a parenthesis, an explanatory statement inserted in the text which would be grammatically complete without it. In other words, verses 4-6 are incidental to the subject of the chapter. The subject of the chapter is the destiny of Satan. In the first three verses, the angel binds Satan and puts him into prison. If we skip to v7ff to keep the context, Satan is released from prison. If someone skipped verses 4-6, they would get the thought of the chapter, yet no one would get the theory of premillennialism. Still, men have constructed whole systems of eschatology, theology, and philosophy of history out of these three verses!

The reason for this parenthesis is obvious to those who have studied the Old Testament prophets and Revelation seriously. Many times, God inserted such a section to supply comfort in the midst of judgment. He generally offered hope to the faithful. While God spoke of judgment on the unrighteous nation, those faithful within that nation may have felt that they would have judgment "splashed over" on them as well. God reassured the faithful in these circumstances. For example, in Ezekiel 9 God was about to destroy Jerusalem. But, before he sent in the angels of destruction, he sent in an angel to mark all the faithful. Thus, the Babylonians would not destroy them, too. God wanted the faithful to know they were safe.

Isaiah and Jeremiah also have many examples where God paused in the midst of prophecies of very harsh judgment to give hope to the faithful. This is the same point made in Revelation 7, when God had the faithful marked so that he would spare them in the destruction of their enemy. Then, in Revelation 20, God (in this parenthetical passage) gave the faithful hope. Thus, this paragraph is a type of "Meanwhile, back with the saints" section. What do the martyred saints do during the judgment of Satan?

Verse 4: And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as worshiped not the beast, neither his image, and received

not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Notice first the plural "thrones" in this verse on which "they" sat. Who are "they"? John did not see bodies ruling on those thrones, but souls. We have followed the souls of these martyred Christians all the way through Revelation. John said they had been *beheaded* for the testimony of Jesus. The word *beheaded* comes from a word which means "to axe, to cut off with an axe." These were those who had suffered cruel, crude, and violent deaths because they would not disobey Christ by worshiping the emperor or going back into Judaism.

This was a rule or reign of martyrs. Their enemies had martyred them for the word of God; that is, because they stood for the word of God and did not deny it in the face of persecution.

As we've seen, this is a major theme of the book of Revelation as Jesus promised in Rev. 3.21:

> He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne.

This was what the martyred saints in Revelation 20 had done. They had overcome in the same manner that Christ had, and they sat down with Christ in His throne, or "reigned with Christ." We've also seen such martyrs in Rev. 6.9-11, 12.10-11, 14.13, 15.2-4, and now we're seeing them again here in 20.4.

But John also showed that Christians, who had that martyr's spirit, participated in the reign of the saints even while they were alive. It will surprise some to learn that we can discover this even before we study Revelation. For example, in II Tim. 2.11-12, Paul said:

> Faithful is the saying: *For if we died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him:* if we shall deny him, he also will deny us.

This is exactly the point of Revelation. If the Christians persecuted by the Jews did not deny Christ (they held to the word of their testimony—Rev. 12.11) they would reign with Christ.

In the throne scene of Rev. 5.9-10, John saw the twenty-four elders sing the new song before the throne of Christ and he said:

> And they sing a new song, saying, Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of very tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth (Gr. *ge*, land).

The Christians who reigned upon the earth were those who endured. They did not deny Christ and they shared in the reign with the saints who the enemy had already martyred.

In Rom. 5.17, Paul spoke of the reign of such Christians with Christ:

> For if, by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; much more shall *they that receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life* through the one, even Jesus Christ.

Finally, in Rom. 8.35-37, Paul said:

> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things *we are more than conquerors* through him that loved us.

Thus, Christians who were faithful unto death were overcomers, or conquerors, but they were even more than conquerors. They reigned in life with and through Jesus Christ. They overcame Satan the same way that Christ had: by His blood, by the word of His testimony, and because they loved not their life even unto death.

Revelation describes how Christians could overcome Satan and reign with Christ. Revelation describes the victory of the cause for which Christians died.

Verse 5: The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished. This is the first resurrection.

The "rest of the dead" were the dead who were not Christians. These were the wicked dead, perhaps Christians who caved in, who did not love their lives unto death, or rebellious Jews. These were the peo-

ple who sided with Satan when they worshiped the beast and participated in Caesar worship or caved in to Jewish persecution. They did not reign with Christ, yet John saw that the righteous dead were already with Christ. *The first resurrection was the process whereby those faithful unto death were taken to be with Christ,* and those who were not overcomers had no part in it!

Some say that the first resurrection was a physical resurrection. But John nowhere saw their bodies, which rules out a physical resurrection. Others think that the first resurrection may take place at baptism. Baptism involves a spiritual resurrection (a resurrection of the spirit of man), for Paul said in Rom. 6.3-6:

> Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin.

When the old man, who is dead in sin, is buried in baptism, and raised to walk in newness of life, what is that but a resurrection? Yet, the first resurrection of Revelation 20 is not newness of life upon obedience to the gospel. Eternal death is still possible to those who have been baptized. Paul taught in Rom. 6.16:

> Know ye not, that to whom ye present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

These Christians [those buried in baptism and raised to the new life (Rom. 6.3-6)], could sin and die again if they presented themselves as servants of disobedience. This was exactly the choice Christians under Rome and Judaism had. Did they obey Caesar and obtain the second death, or obey Christ unto death and receive eternal life? Did they obtain the first resurrection and not be in danger of the second death?

Also, in Rev. 21.7-8, John spoke of the heavenly reward the faithful would obtain:

> He that overcometh shall inherit these things: and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death.

Some Christians, although they were baptized, may have fallen into this latter category—they may have been fearful, unbelieving, abominable, sorcerers, and idolaters if they succumbed to the persecution from the enemy. If so, they would receive the second death. Those who had a part in the first resurrection, however, could not. They were faithful, even to the point of death. As we saw in Chapter 14, fire and brimstone was used in the prophets of national judgment.

The essential attitude of an overcomer, choosing death over life, often comes a long time after baptism. Many Christians who obeyed the gospel twenty or more years ago didn't even know they had to have such an attitude. It's only the overcomers who don't have to worry about the second death. John's message was that they had better get in on the first resurrection.

This is an important lesson. It applied first to Christians under Jewish and then Roman persecution, but it applies to Christians today, too. If Christians today fall under government or false religion demands to do something unscriptural, they had better make sure they're ready beforehand to be faithful even to the point of death. Preachers ought to be fearful if they're not obedient to Christ. If they fear for their jobs, they should determine beforehand to be faithful, not just to the point of losing their job, but even to the point of death. Elders who fear full obedience to Christ because of disapproval of the Christians under their charge, should resolve beforehand to be faithful even to the point of death. Christians who fear rejection on the job or at home, should make up their minds beforehand to be faithful even to the point of death. We ought to fear for a Christian who hasn't undergone the first resurrection as instructed by Rev. 12.11, and who will "sell out" cheaper than death.

Verse 6: Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

Jesus had told the Christians at Smyrna in 2.11 that overcomers would not be hurt of the second death, being cast into the lake of fire in 20.14. These are the same as those having a part in the first resurrection.

Significance of 1000 Years

We're finally ready to talk about the 1000 years. We first want to notice that Christ wasn't going to rule for just 1000 literal years. We've already seen in Isa. 9.6-7 that Christ's reign was going to have no end, and we've seen the same thing in Lk, 1.33.

Many think that I Cor. 15.25 ("For he must reign, *till* he hath put all his enemies under his feet.") teaches that Christ will only reign until death is abolished, then he will relinquish authority to his Father. This belief is based on the belief that "until" implies a change in result, an erroneous view from the outset, that ignores all other passages that plainly teach Christ's rule was to be unending. Remember, in Lk. 1.33, Gabriel told Mary:

> ...and he [Jesus] shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Regardless of your view of the timing of the resurrection, can you get the consent of your mind to assert that Christ's rule was to end at "the end"? The revelation that Jesus would "deliver up the kingdom" to his father at the end, leads some to believe that Jesus would no longer be ruling. Certainly, this belief contradicts the plain passages we've just seen of the endlessness of Christ's reign. Additionally, the term "deliver" doesn't mean to surrender or abdicate, any more than the same word meant in verse 3, where Paul said he "delivered unto you" the gospel. He presented the gospel to the Corinthians.

Likewise, in Mt. 25.31, Jesus said:

> But when the Son of man shall *come in his glory,* and all the angels with him, then shall *he sit on the throne of his glory:*...

He didn't say he would get off the throne of his glory, did he? Again, in the context of the Olivet discourse, which Jesus said would be fulfilled in his generation (Mt. 24.34) and while some of his disciples were still alive (Mt. 16.27-28), he said he would be presenting a

fully subdued kingdom before the Father, not quitting his reign and getting off the throne.

In Rev. 22.3, we see Jesus and the father sitting on the throne simultaneously:

> And there shall be no curse any more: *and the throne of God and of the Lamb* shall be therein: and his servants shall serve him;...

Obviously, if Jesus wasn't supposed to be on the throne after the end (of the Mosaic age), when death was destroyed, he didn't know it! And if saints are going to reign with him, they won't just reign 1000 literal years! They were reigning with Christ as overcomers in the first century.

We want to next see how God used the term 1000 throughout the Bible. If we do not, then we or anyone else can teach anything we want.

For example, in Dt. 1.10-11, Moses said to the Jews who were about to send the spies into Canaan:

> ...the Lord your God has multiplied you, and behold, you are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude. May the Lord, the God of your fathers, increase you a *thousand-fold* more than you are, and bless you, just as He has promised you!

What did Moses mean when he said, "a thousand-fold more"? Did he mean he hoped God would bless Israel exactly 1000 times greater and not 999 times greater? No, he meant that God would bless them magnificently, beyond measure. In other words, there was no comparison of the blessings they would get if they were faithful to the blessings they would get if they were not.

In Ps. 50.10, God said, as he compared Himself with idols:

> For every beast of the forest is Mine, The cattle on a *thousand* hills.

Was the point that God owned the cattle on just a thousand hills; not 1200; not 800? Some cattle ranches in Wyoming have more than a thousand hills. Was the point that God doesn't have as many cattle as some ranchers in Wyoming? Obviously, God owned the whole world. The point was, the possessions of God could not compare to the possessions of idols.

In Job 9.3, Job said:

> If one wished to dispute with Him, he could not answer Him once in a *thousand* times.

Was Job's point that, if a man wanted to win an argument with God, just be sure to make 1001 arguments? No. His point was that there was no comparison between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of man.

In Josh. 23.10, Joshua promised certain rewards to the Israelites if they were faithful to God:

> One of your men puts to flight a *thousand*, for the Lord your God is He who fights for you, just as He promised you.

The point was, if God was on their side, how would they fare? There was no comparison of those who stood for God with those who stood against God.

In Dt. 7.9, Moses said:

> Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a *thousandth* generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments.

Moses simply said there was no comparison as to how God keeps His promises and how man keeps his.

Finally, here in Rev. 20, 2, 6, Satan is bound and the saints reign for 1000 years. It's not about time, but the magnificence of Christ's reign over Satan's.

We find further illustrations of this use of 1,000 in Ps. 84.10, 90.4; Isa. 30.17; and II Pet. 3.8. Universally, the point wasn't about the number of hills, the number of answers, the number put to flight, the number of generations, or the number of years. The point was that there is no comparison between the alternatives set forth!

The comparison in the book of Revelation lies in the choice the persecuted Christians faced. Would they remain faithful to Christ or cave in to the enemy? Should they save their skin and give in to a nation that would last for "a little season," or should they overcome and reign with Christ 1000 years? John's point was, *there was no comparison between the magnitude of Christ's rule and Satan's rule* through Rome (even though Rome was the most powerful empire that had ex-

isted till that time). The comparison was between the magnitude of the strength of those who stood with God versus those who opposed Him. There was no comparison!

We can illustrate the choice Christians faced under persecution when we compare the strength of the United States of America with some Guatemalan dictator (where leaders change often). There is no comparison!

So with the Christians under tribulation. There was no comparison between the magnitude of the strength of Christ and that of Satan. Therefore, get on the right side. Satan had but a little time with the enemy nation (6.11); he had but a short time (12.12). If they were faithful to Christ even to the point of death, they would be in on the magnificent reign with Christ. There was no comparison! It ought to have been an easy choice to make.

This was exactly the teaching of the apostle Paul in II Cor. 4.17-18:

> For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

So with the Christians under persecution from Jerusalem and Rome. They, in a sense, invested (1) affliction which was (2) light in weight, and was (3) for a moment. As a return on their investment, they would reap (1) glory, which was (2) weighty and (3) eternal. Quite a return on an investment! There was no comparison what they would reap if they sided with Christ and what they would reap if they sided with Satan. They could renounce Christ and save themselves some temporary, light affliction, but they would gain eternal destruction. Which was better? There was no comparison! Again, Paul says in Rom. 8.17-18 that we are...

> ...joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him. 18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward.

Paul concludes, "there's no contest!" To state it another way, the message to the church from its head and king is, "Don't ever renounce

your citizenship in the eternal magnificent kingdom of the victorious Christ for a brief fling with some tinpot despot whose doom is imminent and certain!"

At this point, the parenthesis of verses 4-6 is over. Now we'll go back and find out what happened to Satan. After all, this is the topic of the chapter. The emphasis of verses 7-10 seems to be that, even though Christ overcame Satan while he was on earth and Christians with the martyr's spirit have overcome Satan ever since the death of Christ, Satan will not give up without a struggle. Even after Christ judged Rome and Judaism, Satan might try to use other nations. Thus, John described the defeat of all of Satan's attempts to destroy Christians in short order.

Verse 7: And when the thousand years are finished, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,

What could possibly stop the magnificent reign of Christians with Christ? Christ would not quit His rule (Heb. 1.6-8, 12.28; Dan. 2.44), but something might keep a Christian from ruling with Him. If a Christian overcame Satan by the process in Rev. 12.11, then to loose Satan would be the termination of that process. Of the three things that caused a Christian to be an overcomer, what could change? The blood of the Lamb would not change, but what about the Christian's testimony? What about the attitude that a Christian loved not his life even unto death?

Could a Christian cave in? Could a Christian begin to love life more than Christ and forsake his testimony? Certainly so, and Revelation was written to prevent Christians under persecution from doing just that.

When Christians no longer overcame Satan because they lost the martyr's spirit, then Satan was loosed to those Christians.

Verse 8: and shall come forth to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.**

Verse 9: And they went up over the breadth of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down out of heaven, and devoured them.**

These verses first teach that until the fall of the harlot city Jerusalem (which took place in Revelation 18-19), Satan would still attempt

to get the nations of the land back like he had them. There were other nations that he might want to bring against the church. We'll study the terms used to describe these nations in just a moment, but notice from verse 9 that whoever these nations were, they were immediately destroyed by the intervention of God. That defeat was so certain it didn't take very long to describe it—not nearly as long as it took John to describe the destruction of Old Covenant Jerusalem.The point was that, just as God intervened and destroyed them, Christians should realize that he would not permit *any other nation* to destroy His church either.

Now, let's determine what Gog and Magog were. Again, if we ignore how God used these expressions elsewhere in the Bible, we may believe just about anything. Bible writers used the terms Gog and Magog in only one other place in the Bible. So, if we try to understand Gog and Magog in Revelation without reference to Ezekiel 38-39, we have no guarantee of successfully understanding the reference to them in Revelation 20. However, if we learn how Ezekiel used these expressions, we may understand these verses confidently.

In Ezekiel 36-37, Ezekiel prophesied of the restoration of Israel and Judah to their own land after the Babylonian captivity. This restoration took place in the fifth century before Christ. Ezekiel 38-39 spoke of the enemies of Israel who would try to hinder that restoration, which they did. Yet the purpose of Ezekiel 38 was to assure Old Covenant Israel that no assaults against them would succeed. We'll see that the reference to Gog and Magog in Revelation 20 serves exactly the same purpose. In Ezek. 38.2-5, God told Ezekiel:

> ...Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meschech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meschech, and Tubal. And I will turn you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them splendidly attired, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords: Persia, Ethiopia, and Put with them, all of them with shield and helmet...

Thus, God identified Gog as a person from the land of Magog, who was also the prince or ruler of Rosh, Meschech, and Tubal. These were all physical nations that existed in Ezekiel's time that opposed the restoration after the Babylonian captivity. These nations were also mentioned in Ezek. 32.26 and Gen. 10.2, soon after the time of the flood in Noah's time.

It is common in our time to hear allusions of Rosh to Russia, Meschech to Moscow, and Tubal to Tobalsk, a city in Russia. Do you suppose that anyone today thinks those allusions would have been valuable in Ezekiel's day or in Genesis 10? Of course not! The only argument that can be made for these allusions is that the words began with the same letters. By this logic, we could just as well state that heaven is hell, because they begin with the same letter!

In Ezek. 38.16, God tells Gog when he will come up against God's people

> ...and you will come up against My people Israel like a cloud to cover the land. It will come about *in the last days* that I shall bring you against My land, in order that the nations may know Me when I shall be sanctified through you before their eyes, O Gog.

Here's a definite timestamp when Gog would arise against Israel, in Israel's last days, the very time element in Revelation!

In Ezek. 38.17, we find a statement that helps identify these leaders and nations with certainty. About Gog, God said:

> Thus says the Lord God, Are you the one of whom I spoke in former days through My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days for many years that I would bring you against them?

Ezekiel said that God's prophets have always talked about Gog. Yet, as we read all those prophets, although they never mention Gog, Magog, Rosh, Meschech, and Tubal specifically, they often mention Israel's heathen enemies. This being true, perhaps John used Gog and Magog as typical names which *represented any heathen leaders and nations* which might oppose God's people. Thus, Ezekiel uses Gog and Magog like we might use the name of Adolph Hitler and Nazi Germany to picture some future tyrant as "a Hitler," and "a Nazi."

In fact, John just plainly said such: "the nations which are in the four corners of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land), Gog and Magog." To illustrate, if I were to tell you "the top Chevrolet salesman for this year, Robert Sikorsky, will get up and make a presentation," I've identified the top Chevrolet salesman. He's Robert Sikorsky.

In the same way, John identifies Gog and Magog as typical heathen nations which might oppose God's people in the present conflict. No matter who they were, they would not be successful! Just as God destroyed Sodom and Gommorah by fire from heaven in Gen. 19.24

and Gog and Magog in Ezek. 39.6, so God would intervene quickly and the church would still come out victorious. If God didn't let Judaism destroy the church, he won't let anyone else, at anytime, do it. God was saying, "I protected the saints in the first century, and I always will." "The war" spoken of in verse 8 would then be any similar crisis for God's people after the destruction of Old Covenant Jerusalem.

Now we come to the judgment of Satan himself. Christ had bound him at His death. Those who had the martyr's spirit in verses 1-3 also bound him. Then he was cast into the lake of fire.

Verse 10: And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

In conclusion to the fall of Satan's entire team against Christ and His saints, we have already seen the judgment of the harlot (chapter 18), and the judgment of the beast and false prophet (chapter 19). In chapter 20, we have the judgment of Satan himself. As his other team members were cast into the lake of fire in this drama John is watching, so was Satan.

Notice that Satan was *cast* into the lake of fire. He was not laid there, assigned there, sent there, or ordered there. He was thrown in. He doesn't rule the lake of fire, he is subject to it. While the faithful saints are "enthroned" with Christ, Satan is "thrown in" the lake of fire. The choice for Christians was easy. Be enthroned with Christ in His magnificent reign by remaining faithful unto death, or serve Satan for a little time and finally be thrown into the lake of fire. Again, there was no comparison!

The lake of fire is symbolic in the pageant John is watching, symbolic of a literal fiery judgment depicted in 17.16 and 18.8. In those passages we saw where Jerusalem was burned utterly with fire. This fulfilled John the Baptist's prophecy of unquenchable fire coming on Old Covenant Israel in Mt. 3.10-12, and Jesus' warning of the same fiery judgment in Mk. 9.43 which was to take place in Gehenna, the valley on the south side of Jerusalem in his generation.

Finally, we have the judgment scene of Rev. 20.11-15. By far, most commentators take this to be a final judgment by Christ at the end of time and, even though I also took this position for many years, I now believe an explanation exists that fits the context of time in Revelation much better.

Verse 11: And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat upon it, from whose face the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **and the heaven fled away: and there was found no place for them.**

We first want to discuss the disappearance of heaven and earth, as it's an important concept and misunderstood by those without a sufficient Old Testament background, both as to what takes place, and when it occurs.

Stanley, who thinks the angel who bound Satan was Christ, says:

> When Christ finished His task (binding Satan–SGD), He was also finished with heaven and earth. There is no place found for them; they fly away. The *end of his reign* brings an end to heaven and earth; they melt with fervent heat (II Pet. 3.10). The beginning of His reign was on the day of Pentecost after His resurrection. The *end of His reign* is at the resurrection of the dead which we see in Chapter 20. (Stanley, *op. cit.* p. 538.)

First, Stanley thinks that Jesus won't finish his task until he binds Satan. As we saw in the first part of this chapter, Jesus most assuredly accomplished that task while he was on earth! He said he came to destroy the works of the devil (I Jn. 3.8), that he couldn't do that until he first bound him, then he could spoil his goods (Mk. 3.27). Finally, in Jn. 17.4, he told the father the last night of his life that "I glorified thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do."

Second, Stanley thinks that *Christ's reign will end* when he binds Satan. Really? Again, in Isa. 9.6,7, we're told that the messiah's reign will have *no end*, and in Lk. 1.33, Gabriel told Mary the same thing!

As to the third part of Stanley's trilogy, we ought not be surprised if his teaching on the passing of the old heavens and earth and the coming of the new is contradictory to the Bible as well. He knows nothing about the concept of heavens and earth in Scripture, and he barely mentions the subject in his commentary. He thinks the term always refers to the planet and stars, the very material of the physical universe. Sadly, it does not.

Heaven and earth are done away with here because in 21.1, they are going to be replaced by a new heaven and earth. We see this occurring a number of times in the Old Testament, and in no case does it ever refer to a destruction of our planet and stars and their replacement by a new planet and stars. Never.

Old Heavens and Earth vs. New Heavens and Earth

Old Testament writers used the passing of an old heavens and earth and the coming in of a new heavens and earth to speak of the passing away of one social order and the bringing in of another.

For instance, notice Isa. 51.15-16:

> But I am the Lord thy God that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The Lord of hosts is His name. And I have put My words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of Mine hand, *that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth*, and say unto Zion, Thou art My people.

Notice that as God spoke of the creation of the nation of Israel, he divided the Red Sea, and put his words in their mouths by giving them the Mosaic Covenant. This was so "that I may plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth." He couldn't have been speaking of the planet and stars, because they had already been created. This heavens and earth was created when they became his people, at Sinai, and it didn't refer to the planet and stars, but a new world order for them, under a new covenant, when he made them his covenant people.

Similarly, in Isa. 51.4-7, Isaiah said the same of Israel. God took away the old order with which they were familiar, and brought in a new one, restored, purified Israel.

In Isa. 65.16-17, physical Israel would pass away, and a new order beyond the first coming of Christ, the Messiah's rule over Christians, would come. Haggai 2.6f contains the same language, which Heb. 12.27 quotes as fulfilled in the late 60s when Hebrews was written (and fulfilled), about the same time Revelation was written (and fulfilled).

A Brief Detour to II Peter 3

We've already seen that Revelation was written about the same time that II Peter 3.1-14 was written. These two books were also written to the same people, Jewish Christians in Asia. We want to pay attention to this chapter because it depicts the same change of order we see in Revelation 20 and 21.

II Peter 3 is a more detailed account of the imminent judgment Peter had already touched upon in I Pet. 4.7-19. In the context of I Peter, Peter said, "the end of all things is at hand," (verse 7). He spoke of "the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you," (verse

12). This was the same fiery trial that was about to come on the churches of Asia to whom Revelation was written a little earlier. He spoke of the "revelation of his (Jesus') glory," (verse 13). This corresponds to Jesus telling his disciples in Mt. 16.27-28 that he would be coming in glory and for judgment *while some of them were still alive.*

Peter also said, "for the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God," (verse 17). In verse 18 he asked, "And if the righteous is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?" In verse 19 he said, "Wherefore let them also that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing unto a faithful Creator." Thus, I Peter deals with an imminent judgment that would seriously affect the children of God. II Peter occurs in this same context of imminent judgment. Does it deal with the same judgment as I Peter, the destruction of Jerusalem, or does it deal with a totally new subject, an advent of Christ at "the end of time?" Does it describe the end of the Mosaic Covenant, as discussed in Matthew 24, or does it describe the end of the planet and astronomical heavens, as we so often hear it portrayed? We want to investigate the answers to these questions.

A Brief Commentary on II Peter 3.3-14

Peter wrote to combat false teachers who were denying the return of Christ. They argued that Jesus had foretold his return in his own generation Mt. 24.29, 34, and during the lifetime of his disciples in Mt. 16.27-28. It had been more than 30 years since Jesus had walked on the earth, and some disciples were getting restless. Would he return as he had promised or not? These false teachers were catering to that crowd.

In II Pet. 3.3, Peter warns of false teachers coming in the last days.

Verse 3: knowing this first, that in the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts,

We've already seen in this volume that the last days are the last days of the Mosaic Age, since the Messiah's age has no end, no last days, last day, nor last hour.

Thus, the last days spoken of in the New Testament are the last days of the Mosaic Covenant, i.e., the time from the coming of John the Baptist to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. For example, see I Pet. 1.20 where God's son was manifested in the flesh in the last days. He wasn't manifested after his rule began, but in the last days of the Mosaic Covenant. In Heb. 1.2, Jesus fully and finally spoke in the last days. Again, this is not after Pentecost, but in the last days of the

Mosaic Covenant. In Isa. 2.2 and Dan. 2.28-45, prophets said the kingdom of the Messiah would begin in the last days and during the Roman Empire. This is easily seen to be the last days of the Mosaic Covenant, not the two thousand years since Pentecost. *The last days of the Mosaic age aren't longer than the Mosaic age itelf!* In Heb. 9.16, 26, Christ's blood was to ratify the New Covenant in the last days. That was the last days of the Mosaic Covenant, not the time following Pentecost. In Joel 2.28 and Ac. 2.17, the Spirit was to be poured out in the last days, i.e., during the last days of the Mosaic Covenant, not throughout the Messiah's rule since Pentecost. Peter warned of the false teachers of his day, whose character he had just described in II Peter 2. In Dan. 9.24-27, 12.4, 13, Mt. 24.3, 13f, and Ac. 2.19-21, we see that the last days were when Jerusalem was to fall totally. Thus, the last days are the last days of the Mosaic Covenant, not the unending age of the Messiah's reign since Pentecost.

Peter said that in the last days of the Mosaic Covenant, the time when he was writing this very letter, that mockers would come. A mocker plays like children, or trifles with something, as opposed to engaging in serious argument or debate. Peter continued with an example of the mockery:

Verse 4: and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

These men were Jewish scoffers, their fathers were the Jewish fathers. Christ had promised an imminent return in Mt. 16.28, 26.64, and Lk. 21.27-33 in which he would judge Israel and destroy Jerusalem. He said this coming would come to pass in that generation, Mt. 24.34. Stephen confirmed this coming, Ac. 6.4 ("we heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place"), and so did the author of Hebrews in 10.37 ("For yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry"). Even James in Jas. 5.7-11 taught it ("coming," verse 7, "at hand," verse 8, "the judge standeth before the doors," verse 9, so "be patient and wait for the lord's coming," (verse 7).

If first century disciples weren't expecting an imminent return of Christ, why would they be mocked about a delay of thirty-five years? Why would they be mocked about a return at least twenty centuries in the future, as most view Christ's return? These Jewish scoffers now said, "It's been thirty-five years since Jesus made the promise. Jesus preached it; the apostles did; we've been preaching this; we've been waiting; and things keep going right on. Since he hasn't come in thirty-

five years, *he won't come!*" These men were not looking for something far off, the way we many times use the passage, but for something in their generation. Peter next showed the fallacy of their position:

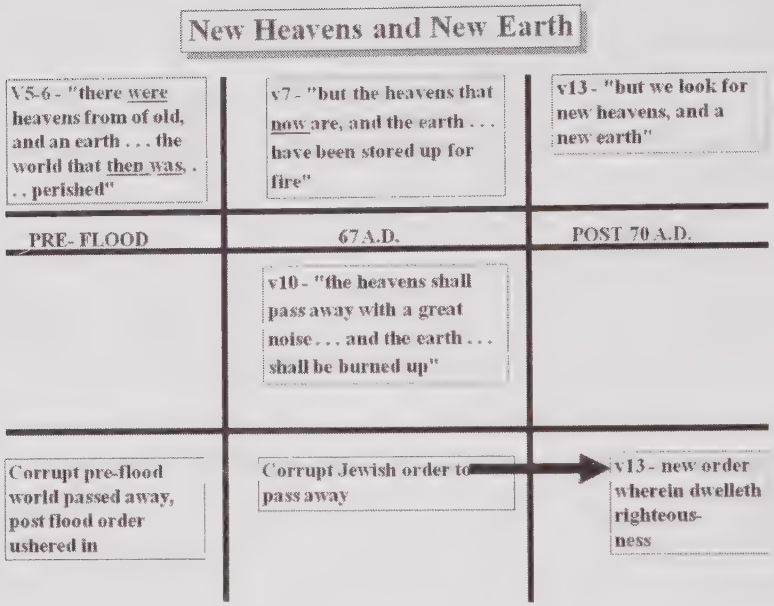
Verse 5: For this they willfully forget, that there were heavens from of old, and an earth compacted out of water and amidst water, by the word of God;

This verse illustrates the free will of man, which doctrinaire Calvinists think is "the most Satanic doctrine ever conceived." These men exercised free will by striving to forget. They were willing to forget the heavens and earth from of old which were to pass away. Notice: this is the heavens and earth that existed before the flood of Noah's day.

Verse 6: by which means the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:

The old world perished by the same means by which God created it—by God's word. Notice that the world that then perished, the old heavens and earth was not the globe and sky. They were still there as Peter wrote, but he spoke of the old world order. Likewise, the planet and stars Peter lived on and under were the same planet and stars Noah lived on and under. Accordingly, the earth and heavens that passed away were not the planet and stars, but the corrupt pre-flood order or world. The planet and stars Peter lived on and under are the same planet and stars we live on and under. Consequently, the earth and heavens that are about to pass away in II Peter 3 are not the planet and stars, but the religious order, i.e., the Mosaic Covenant, still in existence when Peter wrote.

The judgment in Noah's day was typical of the judgment on Jerusalem in the first century. Both were escapable judgments. Jesus even paralleled the two judgments, Mt. 24.37ff. Both judgments destroyed the wicked, and delivered the righteous. Both were worldwide events, for Jews from all over the world were in Jerusalem when it fell, because the city was besieged at the time of the Passover (Josephus, *Wars,* 6, 9, 3).


New Heavens and New Earth
V5-6 - "there were heavens from of old, and an earth . . . the world that then was, . . . perished"
v7 - "but the heavens that now are, and the earth . . . have been stored up for fire"
v13 - "but we look for new heavens, and a new earth"
PRE- FLOOD
67 A.D.
POST 70 A.D.
v10 - "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise . . . and the earth . . . shall be burned up"
Corrupt pre-flood world passed away, post flood order ushered in
Corrupt Jewish order to pass away
v13 - new order wherein dwelleth righteous-ness

Peter continued by saying:

Verse 7: but the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

When Peter spoke of the heavens and earth that "are" to him in 66-67 AD, he lived on the same globe and under the same sky as Noah, as we do. He spoke of the old order of the Mosaic Covenant. The three "heaven and earth" systems of which Peter spoke are illustrated in the chart below.

Malachi foretold that Jerusalem was stored up for fire (chapters 3-4), as did John the Baptist (Mt. 3.10-11), and Jesus (Matthew 24-25). God would not use a flood to destroy the order of Peter's day. It would be burned up with unquenchable fire.

That the old order of The Mosaic Covenant was stored up for fire meant its national overthrow. In Isa. 33.14, speaking of the destruction of Assyria by Babylon, God used terms like "consuming fire" and "everlasting burning."

In Jer. 4.4, God spoke of the destruction of Israel when he said she would "burn with none to quench it," i.e., unquenchable fire. Amos 5.6

describes the destruction of Israel by Assyria in the same terms. See also Isa. 66.24, where Isaiah described the church victorious over its enemies in the same terms.

Thus, fire was to be the Jews' fate, as Peter described it. It was so preached in the first gospel sermon in Ac. 2.17ff, when Peter quoted from Joel: "blood, fire, and columns of smoke." John the Baptist spoke of it (Mt. 3.10-11). Jesus himself said, "I came to bring fire on the earth (land)," Lk. 12.49. James 5.3 and I Thes. 2.16 say the same thing. Last, the fiery fate of Sodom was also a type of Jerusalem's fate, Lk. 17.29f. History confirms that Jerusalem was burned to the ground.

This was the day of judgment for Israel. Peter had so spoken of it in his first epistle, I Pet. 4.12-17. In Mt. 16.27-28, Jesus said this judgment would take place while some of his apostles were still alive. Jesus spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem as a day of judgment, Mt. 25.32. (Read a detailed discussion of Matthew 24-25 in Appendix 2, "The Olivet Discourse.")

Verse 8: But forget not this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

When Peter said that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, he didn't say you can substitute one thousand years for one day wherever you want to. One might say one day equals one thousand years. Consequently, two days equal two thousand years, and 365 days equal 365,000 years. Therefore, one year equals 365,000 years, 1000 years equals 365,000,000 years, which also equals one day! You can't have it both ways, literally. Peter spoke as the Psalmist in Ps. 90.4, when he said:

> For a thousand years in thy sight are like yesterday
> when it passes by, or as a watch in the night.

A watch in the night was generally three hours. The psalmist said one thousand years to God is like three hours, i.e., God doesn't view time as we doGod doesn't sense time as we do, but that's not to say that time isn't important to God. If I borrow twenty dollars from you, and after thirty-five years, I still haven't paid you back, you would probably write the debt off. Peter said these false teachers had better not do that with the promise of Christ's coming in their generation. Peter told why in the next verse:

Verse 9: The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Peter explained the reason Christ hadn't come and destroyed Jerusalem was not because God was slack, i.e., he was not loitering around, or "goofing off." He hadn't forgotten his promise. The reason Christ hadn't come was because he's longsuffering.

Paul, in Rom. 2.4, said that the longsuffering of God works repentance. If God destroyed us immediately when we sinned, none of us would be alive. If he waited five minutes after we sinned to destroy us, we still wouldn't be alive. We want longer, unless of course, someone sins against us, then perhaps we don't want so long! Why does God wait at all? He wants people to change their minds, not because he forgot.

Peter said that God didn't want any to perish. This is the same perishing of which Jesus spoke in Lk. 13.3, "Except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish." There, he warned the Jews of his day: "He will avenge them speedily."

Verse 10: But the day of the Lord will come as a thief: in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Peter said the day of the Lord *would* come. The false teachers were wrong; it would come. The Old Testament, with the exception of the sabbath day, uses the term "day of the Lord" nearly exclusively of national judgment. In Isa. 13.6-9, Babylon received "destruction from the Almighty" on such a day. In Ezk. 30.3, 10 Egypt did. In Joel 1.15, Israel was to see just such a day, just twenty years off. In Joel 2.1, Israel was to see a day of the Lord, the very one of which John the Baptist, Jesus, and Peter spoke. In Obadiah 1.5, Edom was to see such a day. In Zeph. 1.14f, Judah would see "the great day of the Lord," when Babylon destroyed her in 586 B.C.

As we saw in our introductory chapter, the upcoming destruction of Jerusalem was the "day of the Lord," as Peter said in Ac.2.17ff (cf. Joel 2.31f, 3.14-17), and our Lord himself in Mt. 24.27, 30.

Saying that the day of the Lord would "come as a thief," Peter recognized thieves don't send cards saying, "I plan to be in your neighborhood at 10:00 p.m. Tuesday night. Please have everything ready." Though we don't know when the next thief is coming, that doesn't mean we can't have everything ready! The thief's coming will not be

by invitation or announcement. Peter said the Lord's coming would not be by invitation or announcement, either. Jesus gave the same warning about the destruction of Jerusalem in Mt. 24.43 and Lk. 21.34-36.

When Peter said the heavens would pass away, he used language common in the Old Testament to speak of the overthrow of political powers. In Isa. 14.12f, the fall of the ruler of Babylon was spoken of as a falling star. In Isa. 13.10, 13, 19, Isaiah used such language to describe the fall of Babylon; in Isa. 34.4, the fall of Edom. In Isa. 51.6, the nation of Israel would so fall. In Joel 3.16, the fall of Jerusalem after the Messiah was foretold in such words. Peter said it would be so with the destruction of Jerusalem. Peter had said the same thing in Ac. 2.19ff, when he quoted Joel 2.28-32 in the first gospel sermon. Haggai used the same language in Hag. 2.6, *quoted in Heb. 12.26-28 to speak of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem.* Jesus used the same language in Mt. 24.39-42 and Lk. 21.26, 11.

When Peter said "the elements shall melt with fervent heat," we quickly think of the atomic elements, and that Peter spoke of the conflagration of our whole universe. The word *elements* is given for the Greek word *stoicheion*, which occurs seven times in the New Testament. In Heb. 5.12 it stands for the rudiments of the law, as seen in Heb. 6.4-6. In Gal. 4.3, it depicts the rudiments of the world, for those under the Law of Moses, the rudiments of the Mosaic Covenant. In Gal. 4.9, it represents the weak and beggarly rudiments, identified as the days, months, seasons, and years of the Mosaic Covenant. In Col. 2.20, it denotes the rudiments of the world, possibly Gnostic borrowing from Judaism. In none of these passages does anyone think of atomic elements. Then Peter used it in II Pet. 3.10, 12, where the idea comes nearly automatically to mind. No, it's the rudimentary principles of the Mosaic Covenant again, the priesthood, the temple, its sacrifices, the city of Jerusalem, and the genealogies. All were swept away in the fiery destruction, which was imminently to occur.

Peter said they would be dissolved. Dissolved here comes from *luo*, used in Eph. 2.14, "*broken down* the middle wall" between Jews and Gentiles, again speaking of the destruction of the Mosaic Covenant's constraints between Jews and Gentiles. It's also the word used in I Jn. 3.8, where John said that Christ was "manifested to *destroy* the works of the devil."

When Peter said the earth (that then was) and the works (that were therein) were to be burned up, he spoke of the same refining of Israel that John the Baptist had announced in Mt. 3.10-12, the burning up of the chaff. Malachi foretold this refining process in Mal. 3.2-5, 4.1-6.

"Earth" here is also "land." See, for example, Lk. 21.23, 26 where the same term means the land of Israel.

Next Peter turned his attention to the lessons that could be learned from the heavens and earth passing away:

Verse 11: Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness,

Peter here spoke of the dissolving (literally, tearing up, breaking down) of these things, i.e, the earth and the works that then were. The message was: *Be prepared!* He asked, "What manner of persons ought you to be?" He used a word that literally means "of what country should you be?" We might ask this same question in this way, "If the United States is about to wipe out Cuba, of what country should you be?" Not Cuba! Likewise, the Jews to whom Peter wrote had better not be of physical Israel, of Judaism, for God would destroy it.

Likewise, the author of Hebrews mentioned the faithful father of the Jews, who were "strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Paul also reminded Christians in Phil. 3.20 that "our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." This is the manner of person Peter said they ought to be in all holy living and godliness. In other words, both their actions and their attitudes should be prepared. Peter continued his admonition:

Verse 12: looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

This "looking for and earnestly desiring the day of God" is the same as Jesus' exhortations to watchfulness in Mt. 24.44ff. The day of God has to be the destruction of Jerusalem rather than a final advent for two reasons: First, they couldn't look for a final advent of Christ, for there are no signs given of a final advent at the end of time. Second, such an advent wasn't near in Peter's day! However, Peter's audience could look for the destruction of Jerusalem, for Jesus had given signs, Mt. 24.3-15, 32-45 and Lk. 12.56, 21.28. In Heb. 10.25, the author of Hebrews also said his Jewish readers could see the day drawing nigh!

Peter then mentioned that the heavens being on fire would be dissolved. These were the old heavens of Peter's day, the old heavens and earth, the old order. Peter said it would be on fire, and be dissolved. These were expressions similar to those already used to describe the change from the old order to the new, like Edom and physical Israel in the Old Testament.

While these thoughts are on our minds, reflect on Jesus' statement in Mt. 24.35:

> Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

Isn't it clear that Jesus speaks of the passing of the Old Covenant order, not the destruction of the planet and stars?

Peter then described the new order which would replace the old which was about to pass away:

Verse 13: But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

This new heavens and new earth were not a new planet and skies, any more than the new heavens and earth after Noah were a new planet and skies. Peter spoke of the new order of things after the destruction of Jerusalem, the victorious church having weathered Jewish persecution, victorious Christians withstanding potential eradication by Jews.

This new heavens and earth had been prophesied in Isa. 65.17:

> For behold, I create a *new* heavens and earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create *Jerusalem* (the new Jerusalem of Heb. 12.22) as a rejoicing, and her people a joy.

Hebrews 12.22 tells us this new Jerusalem was the New Testament church victorious. Isaiah 66.22 also spoke of new Jerusalem, telling of the days of the work of the apostles; Ac. 3.18-24. Peter told Christians of his day to look for this new order, not implying that Christ did not yet rule, but that his rule had not been completely confirmed by the destruction of the old order. Thus, in Dan. 7.18, 22, Christians were in the kingdom before the enemy was destroyed, but when the enemy was finally destroyed, then they fully possessed a vindicated kingdom. It was not only prophesied that the kingdom was unshakable, but also that it would be proven.

NOW BACK TO REVELATION 20:12

Having seen that the judgment of v11 is of Old Covenant Israel, the old heavens and earth, we now see the same judgment in v12, based as we've seen before on the judgment scene in Daniel 7.

Verses 12: And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works.

At the passing of the old heavens and earth, the destruction of the Mosaic order at the destruction of Jerusalem, we now see the dead standing! Obviously, they've been raised for judgment. Jesus had foretold this judgment in the Olivet Discourse, as seen in Appendix 2, as well as his prior teaching in the gospels (Appendix 1), and subsequently in Acts through Revelation (Appendix 3).

As we just saw in our discussion of II Peter 3 in this chapter, as well as I Corinthians 15 in the introductory chapter, John's teaching is completely in harmony with Peter's and Paul's as they all have the resurrection and judgment occurring at the passing of Old Covenant Israel.

As Daniel foretold in Dan. 12.1, "And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time. Jesus quoted this passage in Mt. 24.21 as to be fulfilled in the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in his generation, Mt. 24.34. At that same time, Daniel said in 12.2, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt." This is the resurrection and judgment of Old Covenant Israel. In Dan. 12.3, Daniel continued: "And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." Jesus quoted this verse in Mt. 13.43 to be fulfilled at the end of the age, the Mosaic age, Mt. 13.39-40. In Dan. 12.6, Daniel asked when these things would be fulfilled, and in v7, he was told, "and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, *all* [not some, not most—SGD] *these events will be completed*," an obvious reference to the destruction of the Jewish temple and the Mosaic system of priests and sacrifices, which occurred in AD 70, Jesus' generation. In v13, Daniel was told, "But as for you, go your

way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age," again, the Mosaic age.

Thus Revelation 20 is patently about the fulfillment of Daniel 12, that predicted the resurrection, i.e. the judgment of the dead, at the end of the Mosaic age, the rewarding of the prophets, when the power of the holy people would be completely shattered. Virtually every element of Daniel 12 is in Revelation 20.

Thus, Daniel, Jesus, Peter, Paul and now John all taught the resurrection would occur at the end of the Mosaic age. (For our detailed comments on the resurrection (over 100 pages), please see chapters 6-13 in our *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things*, available at Amazon.com). When John saw the dead, he saw the wicked dead, the only dead contemplated in this paragraph. The righteous dead were already with Christ, so, after the judgment of Satan, the judgment of his followers was logically next.

In Dan. 7.9-11, a very similar scene, Daniel described God's intervention in a conflict between the fourth beast of Daniel (Rome) and His saints. This beast prevailed against the saints for 1260 days, 3-1/2 years or 42 months, the same length of time the beast of Revelation warred with the saints. Daniel and John spoke about the same conflict;, Daniel from 500 years previous to the conflict, John from the midst of it. Daniel described the event:

> I kept looking until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow, And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, Its wheels were a burning fire. A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The Court sat, And the books were opened. Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking: I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire.

Both Daniel 7 and Rev. 20.11-15 contain a throne, a judgment, books opened, and a fiery punishment. Daniel did not speak of a final judgment of all men at the end of time, but the judgment of Old Covenant Jerusalem at the end of the Mosaic age.

This judgment is also the one foretold in Mt. 16.28-28, where Christ spoke of his return and judgment in the lifetime of his disciples,

one of whom was John, the author of Revelation. It's also the coming and judgment in Jesus' generation of Matthew 24-25. As we show in Appendix 2, "Imminent Judgment in the Olivet Discourse," Matthew 24 discusses the coming of Christ in his generation, based on Joel 2, and Matthew 25 discusses his judgment on the Jews, based on Joel 3. Joel himself connects Joel 2 and 3 to take place at the same time, in the last days of Old Covenant Israel.

Thus Mt. 16.27-28, Matthew 24-25, II Peter 3, and Revelation 20 all speak of the same coming of Jesus and judgment in the first century.

13 And the sea gave up the dead that were in it; and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

"The sea" in the prophets is generally a reference to the Gentile world, as opposed to "the land" of Israel. If so, these dead may be Gentile dead. In 21.1, when "the sea is no more," is probably a reference to the fact that when Old Covenant Israel is gone, the distinction between Jews and Gentiles will be, as well. The old heavens and earth were not the physical planets and stars, and the sea is not the physical oceans, but part of the unseen realm of the dead.

14 And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, even the lake of fire.

For a discussion on whether this lake of fire is literal, please see our remarks on 19.20. For a detailed discussion of the resurrection from hades and the destiny of death and hades, please see Chapters 7-13 of the author's *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things*. You might also want to see Chapters 14-15, "Jesus' Teaching On Hell," and "Lazarus and the Rich Man" in the same volume.

15 And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

The judgment of Satan's team of the two beasts, the harlot, and Satan himself is now complete. We next see the reward for faithful Christians in this life and the next in the New Jerusalem, which is described in Revelation 21-22.

Very briefly, we may outline these chapters as follows to show three pictures of the heavenly reward:

Rev. 21.1-8: New Jerusalem as a Tabernacle—Fellowship with God
Rev. 21.9-27: New Jerusalem as a City—Protection from God
Rev. 22.1-5: New Jerusalem as a Garden—Provision from God

Conclusion

Revelation 20 was fulfilled in the judgment of a horrible enemy of saints at a time which was "at hand," when it was written in the first century. It remains for us a beautiful chapter, which encourages us to be overcomers in whatever time we may live.

Chapter 21

Introduction to New Jerusalem

As we said at the end of the previous chapter, after showing the destiny of all the members of Satan's team in his conflict with Christ, the last two chapters of Revelation will show the destiny of those faithful in Christ's army. We've already seen the destiny of his martyrs—they're already in heaven, happy and resting with Christ. We'll next see what's happened to those who are still on the earth after the judgment of the harlot, the two beasts, and Satan himself. We'll be given three pictures of their state: 1) their fellowship with God and Christ, 2) their protection from all harm, and 3) their provision by God.

21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth (Gr. *ge*, land)**: for the first heaven and the first earth** (Gr. *ge*, land) **are passed away; and the sea is no more.**

Remember the time element of Revelation. The first few verses assured John that what he was seeing was going to happen quickly, soon, and the time was at hand. The book will close in the next chapter with the same assurances of imminence. If the first few and the last few verses of Revelation are correct (not a blatant mistake and even worse, false prophecy), this passing away of the first heaven and earth and the coming of the new heaven and earth are imminent in John's time.

As we've just seen in the previous chapter, we first note that the language of new heavens and earth is NOT speaking of a new planet and stars, but is rather speaking of a new world order for Christians on the earth. Old Covenant Israel is gone and God's New Covenant people have now been rightly identified and established. There's a new heaven and earth, and a new Jerusalem about to come to earth.

When John says "the sea is no more," he's not talking about physical oceans and seas on planet earth, but the sea in his vision, which, in opposition to "the land (of Israel)," was speaking of the outsiders to

Israel: the Gentiles. In the new order, there are no national distinctions, or different conditions for entering into the New Covenant. As Paul said in Gal. 3.28, "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus."

21:2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

This new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, isn't speaking of our heavenly home, at least for living saints, but the dwelling place of the faithful after the destruction of Old Covenant Jerusalem. It's the Jerusalem of Heb. 12.18, 22-24, the universal church of Jesus Christ, all who are in fellowship with Christ, enrolled in heaven, living or dead:

> 18 For ye are not come unto a mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, and unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,... 22 but ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, *the heavenly Jerusalem*, and to innumerable hosts of angels, 23 to the *general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven*, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than that of Abel.

It's also the Jerusalem of Gal. 4.25-26, where in the allegory of Hagar and Sarah, Paul contrasts Old Covenant Jerusalem with this new Jerusalem from above, that John nearly twenty years later is seeing come to earth out of heaven:

> 25 Now this Hagar is mount Sinai in Arabia and answereth to the Jerusalem that now is: for she is in bondage with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother.

21:3 And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God:

The whole concept of tabernacle, and later the temple, is the presence of God with his faithful saints, and fellowship. It symbolized God's dwelling with his people where he met with them. In new Jerusalem, the faithful are always in the presence of God, as he dwells in us, and we in him.

In the valley of dry bones vision in Ezekiel 37, Ezekiel was given this vision while in Babylonian captivity, to illustrate the resurrection of Old Covenant Israel back to their land. Israel and Judah would be reunited under the messiah, God's servant David, since he was from the lineage of David—the root and offspring of David. In vv26-28, we see the complete fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy:

> 26 And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and *will set My sanctuary in their midst forever*. 27 My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. 28 And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, *when My sanctuary is in their midst forever*.

21:4 and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away.

"No tears in heaven" is a famous hymn that many think was inspired by this verse. It's not speaking of heaven, and it doesn't say there are no tears there. Other than that, it's right on the money!

In another "new heaven and new earth" passage, Isa. 65.12-16 (and recall in Chapter 20 that we saw that this wasn't a new planet and stars, but a new covenant world), God used similar language, contrasting the destiny of his servants with their condition under the Old Covenant:

> 12 I will destine *you* for the sword,
> And all of *you* shall bow down to the slaughter.
> Because I called, but *you* did not answer;
> I spoke, but *you* did not hear.
> And *you* did evil in My sight,
> And chose that in which I did not delight. "
> 13 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD,
> "Behold, *My servants* shall eat, but *you* shall be hungry.
> Behold, *My servants* shall drink, but *you* shall be

thirsty.
Behold, *My servants* shall rejoice, but *you* shall be put to shame.
14 "Behold, *My servants* shall shout joyfully with a glad heart,
But *you* shall cry out with a heavy heart,
And *you* shall wail with a broken spirit.
15 "And *you* will leave your name for a curse to My chosen ones,
And the Lord GOD will slay *you.*
But *My servants* will be called by another name.
16 "Because he who is blessed in the earth
Shall be blessed by the God of truth;
And he who swears in the earth
Shall swear by the God of truth;
Because *the former troubles are forgotten,*
And because they are hidden from My sight!

Thus under the new covenant, compared to the old, God's people would eat, drink, shout joyfully, and rejoice loudly in comparison to the hunger, thirst, shame, and heavy heart of guilt under the Old Covenant. To them, *the former troubles are forgotten*. This comparison continues in vv 17-19:

17 "For behold, I create *new heavens and a new earth*;
And the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.
18 "But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create:
For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing,
And her people for gladness.
19 "I will also rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in My people;
And there will no longer be heard in her
The voice of weeping and the sound of crying.

This no more weeping or crying isn't just any weeping or crying, but that caused by covenantal sorrow and judgment under the Old Covenant. The weeping and crying that won't be prevalent under the New Covenant is very kind Paul spoke of while under the condemnation of the Old Covenant. There is no lamentation over one's spiritual

condition like Paul experienced under the Old Covenant, as he stated in Rom. 7.22-24:

> 22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: 23 but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?

Or as David said in Ps. 51.3, "My sin is always before me."

Actually, the verse affirms that there are tears in new Jerusalem. If I'm in new Jerusalem and I think about a close relative, perhaps a mate or a child who's not there, there is healing for those tears. There will be occasions of crying and God will have those tears covered. If someone dies in new Jerusalem, there will be tears, but not as under the old order, the old heavens and earth, or the Old Covenant. John says, the first things are passed away. Paul wasn't still fighting the battle he did when he was under the Old Covenant. There's no mourning over his wretched condition, or tears of the kind Paul had shed under the Old Covenant.

When this great heavenly voice says there's no death in new Jerusalem, he's speaking of spiritual death, the death of which Jesus spoke when he said in Jn. 11.23-26:

> 23 Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. 24 Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. 25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; 26 and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die. Believest thou this?

Martha knew and spoke of the resurrection on the last day (of Old Covenant Jerusalem), when spiritual death and hades were destroyed. Jesus couldn't have been speaking of biological death here because countless believers in him have died since he made that statement. He's speaking of spiritual death. Those who maintain their faith in him will never die spiritually. As John had shown in Rev. 14.13, biological death of the martyrs of Christ only got them their rest and happiness with Christ that much faster!

21:5 And he that sitteth on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he saith, Write: for these words are faithful and true.

So there's a new heaven and earth, a new creation, a new name, a new song, a new covenant, and a new Jerusalem. These things are faithful and true, that is, they're reliable, and you can take them to the bank.

21:6 And he said unto me, They are come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

In Isa. 55.1-3, Isaiah foretold the living water in the Messianic age:

> 1 "Ho! *Every one who thirsts, come to the waters;*
> And you who have no money come, buy and eat.
> Come, buy wine and milk
> Without money and without cost.
> 2 "Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
> And your wages for what does not satisfy?
> Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
> And delight yourself in abundance.
> 3 "Incline your ear and *come to Me.*
> Listen, that you may live;
> And *I will make an everlasting covenant with you,*
> *According to the faithful mercies shown to David.*

Of the water of life, Jesus had promised in Jn. 7.37-39:

> 37 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. 38 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, *from within him shall flow rivers of living water.* 39 But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believed on him were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified.

John's readers were about to see the ultimate fulfillment of that promise.

The Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, the beginning and end of every Greek word ever written.

21:7 He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

New Jerusalem is populated by overcomers, those who are willing to be faithful unto death; they endure to the end (Mt. 24.13). God is their God, and they are his children, and they will inherit everything promised to them in the Messiah's kingdom.

The next verse reveals why some would not overcome. Why wouldn't they?

21:8 But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death.

The fearful here are not those like my sister, who when we were kids, was scared of the dark, so that when I hid in her room and put my hand over her light switch, she would attempt to turn the light on and feel my flesh like the flesh of a dead person, freaking her out. Likewise, it's not speaking of those who are afraid of rattlesnakes. The fearful in our context are those who are afraid of being faithful to the point of death. They're afraid of being faithful to Christ under the tribulation of false religion, political pressure, and other challenges. The fearful aren't going to have any part in God's new city.

The preacher who's fearful of standing for the truth or of tackling a problem because it might cost him his job, or elders who know what should be done in a local church and are afraid of doing it, need to take notice that the fearful are lumped right in with unbelievers, murderers, fornicators, and idolaters!. Likewise, disciples who are afraid of studying openly some Bible subject lest they find they hold to some doctrine that's not Biblical, need to take the same notice.

Some liars were those Christians who when asked, "On penalty of death, are you a Christian?" would deny they were. Recall the liars Jesus had commended the church in Ephesus for trying and finding false in 2.2:

> I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars. (*NKJV*)

Imagine their reaction when they hear this verse of Revelation read in their hearing.

In our pageant, Satan and his two beasts were cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (in 19.20), and now the fearful, liars, and their ilk suffer the same end.

21:9 And there came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, who were laden with the seven last plagues; and he spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb.

John next describes the protection that there is in God's city. This is why cities were founded: to provide for the common defense and protection of their citizens. Due to lack of proper law enforcement and enforcement of personal responsibility, sometimes cities become centers of criminal activity and violence, but originally, and certainly being in God's city, with its impregnable walls, is for the protection of its citizens. It is unconquerable, and, as Jesus said: "the gates of hades (the unseen) will never prevail against it. Like Nineveh and Babylon, it will never vanish.

The Lamb's bride was his wife in the first century and she's called that here. For more on the concept of marriage in Bible times, please see our remarks on 19.9.

21:10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,

Under the control of the Spirit, John is taken to a mountain, perhaps Mount Zion, to show him new Jerusalem coming to earth from heaven. When John saw Christ's bride, he saw the holy city Jerusalem.

21:11 having the glory of God: her light was like unto a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal:

New Jerusalem, the church or body of Christ, has no literal jasper stones. These stones are symbols of some of the most precious things on earth to show the preciousness of Christ's church, his bride, in his sight. Since she has the glory of her husband, she has no less. Such symbols, impressive as they are, fall far short of depicting the reality. If I show a glass of water from the Pacific Ocean to someone who's never seen it, he still doesn't have much of a concept of the Pacific, does he?

21:12 having a wall great and high; having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

The picture here is that the walls of the city are impenetrable. They cannot be violated. Its twelve gates are overseen by twelve angels, and the names of Israel's twelve tribes are inscribed on them, showing the involvement of the Old Covenant saints in this city.

21:13 on the east were three gates; and on the north three gates; and on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.

This is like the arrangement of the camp of Israel in Numbers 2.

21:14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The walls of the city are on twelve foundations, representing the twelve apostles, showing that they too, are represented in this city.

21:15 And he that spake with me had for a measure a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof.

As God had John to measure his temple with a reed in old Jerusalem before it's destruction (11.1), this angel has a golden reed to measure new Jerusalem, not for destruction, but to show it's preciousness to God, and that unlike Old Covenant Jerusalem, it measures up to God's expectations.

21:16 And the city lieth foursquare, and the length thereof is as great as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs: the length and the breadth and the height thereof are equal.

New Jerusalem is symbolized by a cube, as was the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle. A furlong (Gr. *stadia*, a Roman measure, tho various translations render it cubits, miles, stadia, etc.) is about one-eighth of a mile, so the city is huge, 1,500-1,600 mi on a side, roughly the distance from Dallas to Los Angeles. We don't have to worry about there being enough room in New Jerusalem, the universal church, for all who will be in there.

Dispensational premillennialists think new Jerusalem will be built in the modern state of Israel in the Middle East, a land which is only 70 by 150 mi. This is impossible, of course, so they speculate that it will hover over the modern state of Israel. John isn't depicting something being built 2000+ years after his time, but a current reality as he's writing Revelation. The city of God, if it were physical, would more than fill the whole land.

21:17 And he measured the wall thereof, a hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.

John says the wall is about 216 feet high, so no one's going to be in the city who doesn't belong. There will be no one crawling in or jumping over the wall. The wall will supply total protection of God's saints inside the city. Though it's not said, the gates are probably higher than 5 feet, and in v21, they're said to be made of one pearl – hence "pearly gates." How big must the oyster be that makes such pearls? Forget the oyster–the point is the preciousness of God's city!

21:18 And the building of the wall thereof was jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto pure glass.

"Gold like pure glass" doesn't mean the wall was pure glass or gold. John symbolizes its impressiveness, its value, its purity. If you say, "I can't comprehend that," good, neither can I, nor can anyone else. As Paul said in Eph. 3.21, "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think," on the subject of new Jerusalem or any other subject we may use a concordance and study every passage dealing with the subject, God's dealing with it is going to be exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. So with new Jerusalem.

21:19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald;

21:20 the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst.

Twelve of the most precious stones known to man aren't sufficient to describe the walls of new Jerusalem. these stones all go back to Eden. Many of them were used in constructing the High Priest's breastplate.

21:21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the several gates was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

Each gate of the 216 foot high wall is a giant pearl. They would probably be as tall as the wall is. No oyster exists that you can open up and pry such a pearl out of. John's point is how magnificent and how beautiful the exterior of God's city is. Note that there's just one street in God's city. Isaiah had foretold this street in Isa. 35.8-9:

> 8 And a highway will be there, a roadway,
> And it will be called the Highway of Holiness.
> The unclean will not travel on it,
> But it will be for him who walks that way,
> And fools will not wander on it.
> 9 No lion will be there,
> Nor will any vicious beast go up on it;
> These will not be found there.
> But the redeemed will walk there,

Having described the impregnable exterior of God's city, John now describes its interior.

21:22 And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof.

John saw no temple, a place to meet with God, in new Jerusalem. In the new heavens and earth, the new world order after the destruction of the old heavens and earth—Old Covenant Jerusalem, New Jerusalem *is* the temple, the messianic temple that Christ built. There's no most holy place, no holy place, no veil, no barrier to the presence of God. We've seen glimpses of this temple since the first chapter of Revelation. The same terms are applied to Christians under the New Covenant as we see in I Pet. 2.3-6, 9:

> 3 if ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious: 4 unto whom coming, *a living stone*, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious, 5 ye also, as *living stones, are built up a spiritual house*, to be a holy *priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 Because it is contained in scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion *a chief corner stone, elect, precious*: And he that believeth on him shall not be put to shame....9 But ye are a elect race, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:

Paul had the same understanding in Eph. 2.19-21:

> 19 So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, 20 *being built upon the foundation*

> *of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone*; 21 in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a *holy temple* in the Lord;

Thus, those saints in the universal church don't have to travel to a temple, for we are always in God's presence. In II Cor. 6.16, Paul says we are the temple. The Old Covenant temple of stone depicted God and man not yet together. Overcomers were sitting and reigning with Christ at his right hand, as he also overcame and sat down with his father on his throne. God and man are together now.

21:23 And the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb.

In Genesis, the sun and moon were created to separate day from night. In v25, we'll see there's no such separation, for there's no night in this city. New Jerusalem isn't lit by the sun and moon, yet there is tremendous light within its walls. God's glory, and Christ's, provide all the light that's needed.

21:24 And the nations shall walk amidst the light thereof: and the kings of the earth (Gr. *ge*, land) **bring their glory into it.**

New Jerusalem isn't composed of just faithful from the twelve tribes of Old Covenant Israel, but of all the faithful of all nations. As Isaiah had foretold the Messiah's temple in Isa. 2.1-3:

> 1 The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.
>
> 2 Now it will come about that
> In the last days,
> The mountain of the house of the LORD
> Will be established as the chief of the mountains,
> And will be raised above the hills;
> And all the nations will stream to it.
> 3 And many peoples will come and say,
> Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
> To the house of the God of Jacob
> That He may teach us concerning His ways,
> And that we may walk in His paths.

> For the law will go forth from Zion,
> And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

As John says, the kings of the land will bring their glory into the universal church, speaking of notable individuals who obeyed the gospel and are in the body of all those in fellowship with God, both living and dead.

Haggai was one of the prophets God sent to encourage the flagging restorers of the temple after the Babylonian captivity. After the foundation was built, the leaders Zerubbabel and Joshua, and the people were discouraged, thinking the temple wasn't going to be as impressive as the temple of Solomon. In Hag. 2.6-7, 9, Haggai bucked them up with these words:

> 6 For thus saith Jehovah of hosts: *Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth*, and the sea, and the dry land; 7 and I will shake all nations; and *the precious things of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory*, saith Jehovah of hosts. ...9 The *latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former*, saith Jehovah of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith Jehovah of hosts.

In Heb. 12.25-29, the author quotes these very verses as happening in his time, to buttress the flagging faith of Jewish Christians tempted to cave in to persecution and to go back to Judaism:

> 25 See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not when they refused him that warned them on earth, much more shall not we escape who turn away from him that warneth from heaven: 26 whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, *Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but also the heaven*. 27 And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain. 28 Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe: 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

Thus the author of Hebrews understood that in his own time, Haggai's prophecy that the precious things of all the nations was to come into God's temple, and that its latter glory would be vastly superior to that of Solomon's. The temple Zerubbabel built, later vastly improved upon by Herod, was superior to Solomon's, yet Haggai and the author of Hebrews were obviously looking past Herod's temple to the messianic temple, to be imminently fulfilled when Hebrews was written, contemporaneous with the writing of Revelation.

As the author of Hebrews said in 12.1-2, after naming the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11:

> 1 Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians right before Christ came to destroy Old Covenant Jerusalem (Heb. 10.37 – "in a very very little while"), to buttress their faith and encourage them to hold fast against the persecutions of the harlot. It was written to exactly the same people and for the same purpose Revelation was written, and at about the same time. Knowing that all the heroes of faith are in new Jerusalem should make us want to overcome and be there with them. If you knew they would be at my potluck next weekend, you'd be there! How much more so in Christ's messianic temple: the new Jerusalem in the new heavens and earth! Not only so, but Isa. 9.7 assures us:

> Of *the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end*, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this.

That is, the same zeal that performed the restoration of Haggai's day would cause *the increase* of these precious things coming into the messiah's kingdom in our own time!

21:25 And the gates thereof shall in no wise be shut by day (for there shall be no night there):

In Old Covenant Jerusalem, the gates were locked every night. New Jerusalem won't even need her gates shut, and she can be entered at any time.

21:26 and they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it:

See our comments on verse 24.

21:27 and there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie: but only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Old Covenant Jerusalem in John's time was a haunt of demons and a hold of every unclean spirit and every unclean and hateful bird (Rev. 18.2). Nothing like that would be in new Jerusalem, only God's saints of all ages, living or dead, that are in God's register of citizens, saints that have overcome like Christ did.

Chapter 22

The Glorious City

In chapter 21, we saw the first two of three glimpses of Christ's people in New Jerusalem, describing 1) their fellowship with God and Christ, and 2) their protection from all harm. We now see our provision by God in New Jerusalem, vv1-5.

22:1 And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb,

The third glimpse of New Jerusalem is the complete provision God has made for his people there—the same as in the original garden. We are shown a bright crystal river of water. We go to the mountains and marvel at the clear streams, but they don't compare to the river of life in God's garden. They originate in the mountains, but this river originates from God's throne, and flows right through the city along the single street.

One thousand years before New Jerusalem existed, David had spoken of the streams of water in the city of God in Ps. 46.4:

> There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, The holy dwelling places of the Most High.

God had also foretold the availability of these waters in the prophets (Isa. 49.10, Joel 3.18, Zech. 14.8). Jesus had spoken of this water of life to the Samaritan woman at the well in Jn. 4.10-14:

> 10 Jesus answered and said unto unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. 11

> The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: whence then hast thou that living water? 12 Art thou greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his sons, and his cattle? 13 Jesus answered and said unto her, Every one that drinketh of this water shall thirst again: 14 but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life.

He also related this water to the Spirit which would be given to faithful saints in Jn. 7.37-39:

> 37 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. 38 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, from within him shall flow rivers of living water. 39 But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believed on him were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified.

22:2 in the midst of the street thereof. And on this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, yielding its fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

In the early chapters of Genesis, man lost access to the original tree of life. In New Jerusalem, we regain that access. The theme of the Bible is truly: "The tree of life lost and regained." We regain access to the tree of life through the real tree, the tree on which Christ died, as Peter accused the Jews in Ac. 5.30: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew, hanging him on a tree." Peter told Cornelius the same thing in Ac. 10.39, and Paul told the Galatians this in Gal. 3.13:

> 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

This tree of life bore a kind of fruit every month, continually, rather than one month a year, as our fruit trees bear fruit. Even the leaves

of the tree were for the healing of the nations. This may connect with God's wiping away every tear from the eyes of the citizens of his city. These leaves are a balm for whatever sorrow might arise in the hearts of his citizens. John must be speaking to the part of New Jerusalem that's still on earth where the nations can still access the tree of life.

22:3 And there shall be no curse any more: and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein: and his servants shall serve him;

There is no curse in New Jerusalem as there was in the original garden, the curse that resulted from Adam's sin and his loss of access to the tree of life.

We also note that both God and Christ are on the throne simultaneously. Many think that I Cor. 15.25, where Paul says: "For he must reign, *till* he hath put all his enemies under his feet," implies that Christ will reign only until he's conquered death, and then he will relinquish his reign. The mistake made is assuming that *till* implies a change will take place when the death of Adam is destroyed. However, in the sentence, "A will be true until B," the word "until" *never implies at all* that a change will or will not take place after B. When Matthew told us Joseph knew not Mary *until* she had brought forth a son," does *until* imply a change took place in their conjugal relations after Jesus was born? Not at all. A change did take place, for we see other children coming into the family. While we don't learn this from "until," we understand it from other passages.

Similarly, when Christ is said to rule "until" he puts all his enemies under his feet, no change in his rule, when all his enemies are subjected, is implied. However, we learn from other passages, both in the Old Testament and the New, that Christ's reign has no end.

We can see that in Revelation since both God and Christ are still enthroned after the resurrection and the destruction of the death of Adam. For more detailed discussion of I Corinthians 15, please see chapters 7-13, "The Resurrection of the Dead," in the author's *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things*.

For now, we merely note that Christ is still ruling with his father, and his servants serve him. God's people were serving him in the original garden, and they're serving him in the new garden. The reign or rule of God and Christ on the throne assures that there will be no curse there.

22:4 and they shall see his face; and his name shall be on their foreheads.

Seeing his face testifies to a closer relationship with Jesus in the New Jerusalem, now that his tabernacle is with men and that we're stones in his messianic temple. Recall, in I Cor. 13.12, Paul contrasts the time when God's revelation was incomplete and miraculous spiritual gifts were in operation, to when the revelation was complete:

> For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but *then face to face*: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known.

This statement also applied while Christ's church was on the earth. Note also that his name is still on their foreheads, showing his ownership and approval.

22:5 And there shall be night no more; and they need no light of lamp, neither light of sun; for the Lord God shall give them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

Those in New Jerusalem are no longer in darkness as they have all the light they need from their source, God, with whom they're reigning unendingly. What an assurance to those still facing tribulation on the land.

22:6 And he said unto me, These words are faithful and true: and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angels to show unto his servants the things which must shortly come to pass.

Words that are faithful and true are reliable. God sent the prophets and he inspired their teaching through their spirits (as Paul describes in I Cor. 2.10-13:

> 10 But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. 11 For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. 12 But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God. 13 Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words.

Notice specifically what teaching is true and reliable: the things which *must* (not might) *shortly come to pass.* Jesus began the book by speaking of its content which would take place shortly and that the time was at hand, and he's coming quickly (1.1-3), and now he's closing the book the same way. The front and back covers of the book so state and apply to everything between the covers. Revelation is not something way off in the future for first century Christians, and it's not something in our future, either. It's a present reality, faithful and true.

22:7 And behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book.

Jesus pronounces a blessing on those hearing and keeping the prophecy of this book. In a nutshell, the book teaches: "Be thou faithful unto death, and receive the crown of life."

22:8 And I John am he that heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel that showed me these things.

22:9 And he saith unto me, See thou do it not: I am a fellowservant with thee and with thy brethren the prophets, and with them that keep the words of this book: worship God.

Again, John is so impressed and overwhelmed with this angel that he falls down to worship him, and again, the angel tells him not to do so for he is a fellow servant with John. John surely knew it wasn't proper to worship a created being. He knew it better than I do. It's impressive to think that after I've taught lessons for nearly fifty years against worshiping a created being, that someday you may look over at me doing that very thing!

John's behavior makes the worship of Jesus even more impressive. Jesus accepted that worship, and never upbraided anyone like this angel does with John.

22:10 And he saith unto me, Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand.

Here's another piece of evidence on the imminence of the fulfillment of Revelation in John's time. He was told not to seal up the words of the prophecy. Contrast that with what Daniel was told in his book. After giving his prophecies of things that were going to happen to God's people in the days of the Roman empire, Daniel was told *to* seal up his prophecies. Notice in Dan. 8.26 (written in 551 BC):

> 26 And the vision of the evenings and mornings
> Which has been told is true;
> But keep the vision secret,
> *For it pertains to many days in the future.*

Also in Dan. 12.4, 9, Daniel was again instructed:

> 4 But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time (lit., time of the end, KJV); many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase.... 9 And he said, Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time (lit., time of the end, KJV).

The "time of the end" in these verses isn't the end of time itself, but the time of the end of the Mosaic age in Israel's last days. This was 600 years in Israel's future, and just several years in John's future. Jesus' coming wasn't that far off to John and his fellow servants.

If "many days" in Daniel's case was about 600 years, since John was told *not* to seal up his book because the time was at hand, "at hand" would have to be very considerably less than 600 years, and it's certainly not 2000+ years to our day, and still future to us as most people think.

22:11 He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still: and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him do righteousness still: and he that is holy, let him be made holy still.

I'm betting you've never heard a sermon on this verse. Have you ever heard a preacher say, "If you're filthy, just be filthy still"? We wouldn't dare, would we? I never have. Yet that's Bible preaching! What's the point? I believe John's saying: I've come to the conclusion, the story is over, time's up, and there's no more time to persuade anybody. If someone's sinning, it's too late for him to repent. If someone's still filthy, he's out of time. Let each man be responsible. That's what Jesus did, didn't he? He didn't beg people to obey God. He wanted them to, he taught them how to, and he encouraged them to, but he made each person be responsible for himself.

If you want to be an atheist, be a good one. Get on one side or the other; make up your mind and get off the fence! That's what the Bible says on the last page.

22:12 Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is.

Jesus' coming soon with his reward and rendering to each man is the exact thing he promised in Mt. 16.27-28:

> 27 For the *Son of man shall come* in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he *render unto every man according to his deeds*. 28 Verily I say unto you, there are *some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death*, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

It's also the exact teaching of Matthew 24-25, his coming in his generation, and rendering judgment on Old Covenant Israel.

22:13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

We've seen this language used of the Lord God the Almighty in 1.8 and 21.6. Here it's impressively used of Christ.

22:14 Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city.

In 7.14, we saw those coming out of the great tribulation (by being faithful unto death) and they washed their robes in the blood of the lamb and were standing before the throne of God. Obviously, these were in the part of New Jerusalem that is already in heaven, as they were already dead. They also have access to the tree of life, and are in the holy city.

22:15 Without are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie.

Without, or outside the city, are the dogs. We're not talking spaniels or terriers here, but spiritual dogs. Paul had called judaizers dogs in Phil. 3.2, and Jesus admonished to "give not that which is holy to the dogs." They were scavengers preying on people. They're not going to be in the city, and neither are the sorcerers (Gr. *pharmakea*, operated with drugs), fornicators (either spiritual or physical fornication), murderers, idolaters, or liars. There will be no false brethren, false teach-

ers, or false anything. This is one of the best reasons for one to be in New Jerusalem. Paul had taught this same thing in I Cor. 6.9-10:

> 9 Or know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

22:16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star.

John has given Christ's message to the seven churches in chapters 3-4, and Jesus repeats his claim to the ancestry of David, and that he's the bright and morning star. This is the signature of the true author of this book.

22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely.

Now the Spirit and the church, New Jerusalem, issue an invitation to the faithful saints to join them. They invite those who thirst spiritually to join them for access to the water of life: those who are weary with persecution, poor in spirit, humble and meek, thirsty—whosoever can voluntarily take advantage of this invitation. If anyone doesn't, it's simply because he didn't will to.

22:18 I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book:

The author, along with myriads of others, has used this verse to warn people of our time not to add to God's word. This is a noble warning, but it's a total misuse of the passage. "This book" is the book of Revelation. "The plagues" are the plagues we read of in Revelation 15, and the bowls of wrath poured out on "the land" in 16.1, that is vengeance on Old Covenant Israel on the land of Palestine in the first century in vindication of the martyrs. If I use this warning to warn someone in my city against adding to God's word, does anyone really believe that that person is in danger of suffering the bowls of wrath promised to Old Covenant Israel in the first century in vindication of

the martyrs? That would be unmitigated nonsense, would it not? And wouldn't I be "adding to God's word" to make such an application?

Of course, God has never allowed anyone to add to his word. In Dt. 4.2, God told Israel:

> You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

Similarly, in Prov. 30.5-6, God said:

> 5 Every word of God is tested;
> He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.
> 6 Do not add to His words
> Lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar.

Such passages, along with II John 9, would be much more appropriate to buttress the point of using only the Bible as a standard of authority of religious belief and practice than adding to Rev. 22.18 and proving oneself a liar. For a thorough discussion of II John 9, please see Appendix 4, "II John 9 and the Teaching of Christ" in the author's *Fellowship: With God and His People, The Way of Christ Without Denominationalism*, available at Amazon.com.

22:19 and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.

"This book" is the book of Revelation, and Christ no more wants people to add to it than God wants anybody to add to any of his books. He didn't in Dt. 4.2, where he pronounced a curse at the beginning of Old Covenant Israel, and he didn't in Prov. 30.5-6, in the middle of the Bible. Now, on the last page of the Bible, he still doesn't. Anyone adding to God's word will have the plagues in Revelation added to him; anyone subtracting from Revelation will have the blessings of it subtracted from him. This includes preachers, elders, and any other saint in Christ's church.

22:20 He who testifieth these things saith, Yea: I come quickly. Amen: come, Lord Jesus.

Jesus again affirms that His coming is imminent, and someone says, "Amen," that's the way it is, so come on ahead, Lord Jesus.

22:21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints. Amen.

John closes the book with the promise that the grace of Christ will be with such saints, and, that's the way it is, an amazing statement to Christians in tribulation. Christ's grace is with those Christians, as it is in every verse of the 404 verses in this book.

Appendix 1

The Theme of Imminent Judgment In the Gospels

Introduction

Anyone with familiarity with the New Testament probably knows that it speaks of a judgment of Old Covenant Israel in connection with the coming of the Messiah. John the Baptist and Jesus spoke of such a judgment during their ministries in the Gospels. Other New Testament writers, like Paul, Peter, James, and John, also spoke of a coming judgment in their books. Most of this teaching is mistakenly interpreted in our time as a judgment coming on all men at a supposed end of time. It is our purpose in this essay to survey this teaching, developing it in its proper context.

Brief Old Testament Background of Messianic Judgment from Malachi

In Malachi 3.1-6, we read:

> 1 Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, *He is coming*, says the LORD of hosts. 2 But who can endure *the day of His coming*? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they

> may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, as in the days of old and as in former years. 5 *Then I will draw near to you for judgment*; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien, and do not fear Me, says the LORD of hosts. 6 For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

At the close of the Old Testament, and before 400 years of silence of prophets between the testaments, Malachi foretells the coming of two messengers. In Mal. 3.1, the first, God's messenger, will prepare the way for the Messiah, and the second will be the Messiah himself, the messenger of the covenant. We know this is true, because in Mt. 11.10-12, Jesus quotes this very verse and says it referred to John the Baptist:

> 10 This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, Who shall prepare thy way before thee. 11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist: yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

In Mal. 4.5 (which we'll discuss further momentarily), the first messenger is called Elijah, whom Jesus identifies as John the Baptist (Mt. 11.11-12, 14 and Mt. 17.12) because he (as Gabriel told John's father Zacharias in Lk. 1.17) came in the spirit and power of Elijah. Speaking of the coming of the Messiah in 3.2, Malachi says,

> But who can endure the *day of His coming*? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.

Refiner's fire and fuller's soap refer to the cleansing from impurities that Old Covenant Israel will undergo at the Messiah's judgment of the nation. Refining fire is a metallurgical term describing the smelting of impurities from metal. A fuller is one who cleaned and thickened freshly woven (usually woolen) cloth. The process involved

cleaning, bleaching, wetting, and beating the fibers to a consistent and desirable condition. Fuller's soap was an alkali made from plant ashes which was used to clean and full new cloth. Since fullers required plenty of running water and the natural substances described, a fuller's field was a place where all were available for the fullers to conduct their profession. In Mal. 3.3, Malachi said:

> And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.

In v4, Malachi describes the result the Messiah will have on Old Covenant Israel:

> Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, as in the days of old and as in former years.

So, a renewed Israel will be produced. At the same time (v5), God says:

> *Then I will draw near to you for judgment*; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien, and do not fear Me, says the LORD of hosts.

These words describe God's judgment on those of Israel who will not be refined and cleansed from their impurities.

In Malachi 4.1-6, the prophet continues:

> 1 For behold, *the day is coming, burning like a furnace*; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and *the day that is coming will set them ablaze*, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. 2 But for you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. 3 And you will tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet *on*

> *the day* which I am preparing, says the LORD of hosts. 4 *Remember the law of Moses My servant*, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. 5 Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of *the great and terrible day of the LORD*. 6 And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I *come and smite the land with a curse*.

Verse 1 describes the day of judgment when the Messiah will purify Israel, as he will harvest the nation, thresh the wheat from the chaff, and set the chaff ablaze. Verse 2 shows that the godly will survive the harvest and refining process, while verse 3 shows the destructive effect that the same judgment process will have on the wicked:

> And you will tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet *on the day* which I am preparing, says the LORD of hosts.

That this is to be seen as a Jewish judgment based on the Mosaic law is seen in verse 4:

> *Remember the law of Moses My servant*, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.

Verse 5 speaks of the coming of Elijah (who Jesus identifies as John the Baptist) before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.

The result of John's work is seen in verse 6:

> And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse.

Thus, John, the messenger of the Messiah, would prepare Old Covenant Israelites for the Messiah's judgment on the day of the Lord, when the Messiah would smite the land of Israel with a curse, destruction.

To summarize Malachi's prophecy of the Messiah's judgment, we have:

The day of the Lord's coming – 3.2
The day of judgment – 3.5
A day of harvest and smelting – 4.1, 3.2
A judgment of Jews – 4.4
A Great and Terrible Day – 4.5
The Messiah would smite the land with a curse – 4.6

Notice that none of these events occurred during Jesus' earthly ministry. John fulfilled Malachi's prophecies concerning him (as we're about to see), but Jesus did not fulfill the prophecies Malachi made concerning him during his three year ministry. However, we will see that Jesus foretold that these events would be fulfilled during his generation.

John the Baptist Fulfills Malachi's Prophecies of Him

In Mt. 3.1-12, we begin to see the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecies of John the Baptist and Jesus. In verse 5, John, who began preaching about six months before Jesus did, attracting stupendous crowds, for in vv5-7 we read:

> 5 Then went out unto him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about the Jordan; 6 and they were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said unto them, Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Here John is preaching the message that Malachi foretold, and that Old Covenant Israel needed to hear, a message of repentance, lest they encounter God's wrath that was (lit.) *about to* come. John doesn't speak of wrath way off in the future, but imminently. The imminence is also shown in verse 10, when John says:

> And even now *the axe lieth at the root of the trees*: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the *fire*.

John points out to his audience that the harvest isn't far off, as the axe is already at hand, at the root of the fruitless tree of Old Covenant

Israel, and their end is to be burned, a fiery, refining judgment which will purify Israel.

Notice the use of "fire" in John's preaching. In v10, it's used of the judgment coming on the Jews. In vv 11-12, John says further concerning this fire:

> 11 I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in *fire*: 12 whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor; and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable *fire*.

Notice in verse 12 that John speaks of the Messiah's imminent harvest of Israel. His winnowing fan is already in his hand, and he's going to burn the chaff of Old Covenant Israel with unquenchable fire, fire that cannot he extinguished, or stopped. Notice that "fire" occurs each of verse 10-12. Many read of the Messiah's baptizing in the Holy Spirit and fire to be a blessing, and claim to be fire-baptized. Baptism in the Holy Spirit certainly was a blessing, but baptism in fire was not. Since fire in verses 10 and 12 is speaking of a fiery punishment, undoubtedly baptism in fire in verse 11 was not a blessing, but punishment. Thus, John affirms that the judgment of the Messiah would be a blessing to the godly, but destruction for the ungodly. This is similar to the flood in Noah's day: the same water that destroyed the unrighteous also saved the righteous from earthly destruction. Likewise, when the Roman army besieged Jerusalem in AD 70, their coming provided for the salvation of the righteous Jews (due to their escaping, Mt. 24.16) while the unrighteous who didn't heed Jesus' warning were killed in the tumult.

For now, we merely notice that, as Malachi had foretold, John the Baptist warned of a imminent fiery messianic judgment on Old Covenant Israel.

A SIDE TRIP: Deuteronomy 32 the Basis of Malachi's, John's, Jesus', and the Apostles' Teaching

We now want to notice an extremely important chapter with reference to the Messiah's judgment of Israel, Deuteronomy 32, the Song of Moses. With the aid of several student friends, I've recently come to the conclusion that Deuteronomy 32 may indeed be the most important chapter of the Bible, yet hardly anyone reads it, or appreciates the significance of it. I've taught the Old Testament through five or six times, yet I've missed the importance of this chapter. It's no exaggeration to say that Deuteronomy 32 is the basis of the teachings of the Old Testament prophets, as well as the teaching of John the Baptist, Jesus and his apostles throughout the New Testament.

We began our study of God's foretelling of Old Covenant Israel's end from its beginning by noticing a characteristic of the true God as opposed to idols. In Isa. 46.5-7, God compares himself with idols:

> 5 To whom would you liken Me, And make Me equal and compare Me, That we should be alike? 6 Those who lavish gold from the purse And weigh silver on the scale Hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; They bow down, indeed they worship it. 7 They lift it upon the shoulder and carry it; They set it in its place and it stands there. It does not move from its place. Though one may cry to it, it cannot answer; It cannot deliver him from his distress.

This is an accurate description of man-made gods. They can't talk, they can't walk, they have to be nailed down so they won't fall over, as they can't stand on their own. In vv9-10, God further says:

> 9 Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure;

Notice in particular that the true God is the one who can declare the end of a matter from its beginning. We now want to notice where

God declares the end of Old Covenant Israel from its national beginning, particularly in Deuteronomy 32.

Just before Moses' death, after he led the first generation of Jews through the wilderness of Sinai, he brings them to the border of their promised land. In Deuteronomy 28-30, he pronounces all the blessings Israel will receive if they remain faithful to him, and all the curses they will receive if they are unfaithful. In Dt. 31.19-21, God instructs Moses to write a song, the Song of Moses, and teach it to Israel:

> 19 Now therefore, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it on their lips, in order that this song may be a witness for Me against the sons of Israel. 20 For when I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and are satisfied and become prosperous, then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and spurn Me and break My covenant. 21 Then it shall come about, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify before them as a witness (for it shall not be forgotten from the lips of their descendants); for I know their intent which they are developing today, before I have brought them into the land which I swore.

God tells Moses that this generation of Jews isn't going to turn out good. He is to teach the Song of Moses to Israel, so that when they became unfaithful to him and his judgments began to fall on them, this song and their singing of it would be a witness that God told them how they were going to turn out. Future generations of Jews, including the ones whom Jesus taught, knew this song—they had been taught it since childhood. In Dt. 32.29, Moses told Israel:

> 29 For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands.

Moses tells them that punishments from God will befall them "in the latter days," i.e., in their future, because of their involvement with false gods. This would include a variety of punishments, including the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. However, in Dt. 32.20-21, Moses

becomes much more specific, foretelling the very end of the nation of Old Covenant Israel:

> 20 Then He said, I will hide My face from them, I will see what their *end* [emphasis mine throughout—SGD] shall be; For they are a perverse generation, Sons in whom is no faithfulness. 21 They have made Me jealous with what is not God; They have provoked Me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation,

God now foretells "the end" of Old Covenant Israel, that their last generation will be a perverse generation. Jesus, of course, called his generation of Jews an "unbelieving and perverse generation" in Mt. 17.11, and in the first gospel sermon, Peter called faithful Jews to "save yourselves from this perverse generation" (Ac. 2.40).

We can know that the generation of Jesus and Peter is the one under consideration in Deuteronomy 32 since Paul quotes Dt. 32.21 in Rom. 10.19 as justification of his taking the gospel to the Gentiles in an attempt to provoke the Jews to jealousy. This was in the early 60s AD, shortly before the end of Old Covenant Israel in AD 70.

Continuing in Dt. 21.28-29, we read:

> 28 They are a nation without sense, there is no discernment in them. 29 If only they were wise and would understand this and discern what their end will be! (NIV)

Thus, "the end" of Old Covenant Israel was foretold at their beginning in Sinai, verifying that the true God is faithfully called the one who foretells a matter's end from its beginning, in this case, sixteen centuries before!

Deuteronomy 32 and Revelation

Dt. 32.30-33 gives an important key to interpreting the book of Revelation:

> 30 How could one chase a thousand, And two put ten thousand to flight, Unless their Rock had sold them, And the LORD had given them up? 31 Indeed their rock is not like our Rock, Even our enemies them-

> selves judge this. 32 For their vine is from the vine of Sodom, And from the fields of Gomorrah; Their grapes are grapes of poison, Their clusters, bitter.

It's interesting that in the Bible, God doesn't call any city Sodom besides Jerusalem, and it's surprising how many times she is called by that name. For example, in Isa. 1.9-10, Jerusalem is called Sodom:

> 9 Unless the LORD of hosts Had left us a few survivors, We would be like Sodom, We would be like Gomorrah. 10 Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah.

Likewise, Jer. 23.14 is another example of Jerusalem being referred to as Sodom and Gomorrah:

> 14 Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: The committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; And they strengthen the hands of evildoers, So that no one has turned back from his wickedness. All of them have become to Me like Sodom, And her inhabitants like Gomorrah.

Please see another example in Ezek. 16.47-48.

In Revelation, we find the theme of two cities: Babylon, the great harlot city which is destroyed, and New Jerusalem, which replaces it. One might suspect that Babylon is Old Covenant Jerusalem since New Jerusalem replaces it, but we won't have to rely on suspicion. In Gal. 4.21ff, Paul gives the allegory of Hagar and Sara. These women represented two covenants (the Mosaic Covenant and Christ's new covenant), two peoples (old and new covenant Israel), and two cities (old and new covenant Jerusalem). Hagar represented "the Jerusalem that now is and is in bondage with her children" (v. 25), "but the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother" (v. 26). This is Paul's version of "the tale of two cities." In Heb. 12.18-23, written to Jewish Christians, the author contrasts two mountains (Sinai and Zion) and two cities (earthly and heavenly or Old and New Covenant Jerusalem). We see the same comparison in Revelation. In Rev. 11.8, we have:

> 8 And their dead bodies lie in the street of the great (harlot—SGD) city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.

If we know where the Lord was crucified, we know the identity of this religious harlot Sodom. It is Old Covenant Jerusalem. Babylon is spoken of again in Rev. 18.24:

> 24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that have been slain upon the earth (*ge*, lit., land—SGD).

Thus, Revelation has the great harlot, responsible for killing the prophets and saints, as the great city Babylon. Interpreters of Revelation speculate whether Babylon is literal Babylon in Iraq, or Rome. Neither of those cities slew God's prophets, but Old Covenant Jerusalem certainly did. In Lk. 13.33-34, Jesus said:

> 33 Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem. 34 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her own brood under her wings, and ye would not!

Thus, in Revelation, Jerusalem was the harlot city that killed the prophets, and where Jesus was crucified.

Back to Deuteronomy 32

We conclude our side trip into Deuteronomy 32 and Revelation and return to our discussion of Deuteronomy 32. In Dt. 32.34-36, we have Moses speaking of God's vengeance on Israel:

> Is it not laid up in store with Me, Sealed up in My treasuries? Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, In due time their foot (Old Covenant Israel—SGD) will slip; For the day of their calamity is near, And the impending things are hastening upon them. For the LORD will vindicate His people (the faithful of Old Covenant Israel—SGD), And will have compassion on His servants; When He sees that their strength is gone, And there is none remaining, bond or free.

Notice that vengeance and vindication will take place at the same time. Both groups of people will see the same event, the end of Old

Covenant Israel (at the hands of the Romans in AD 70) and interpret it entirely differently. The wicked see cruel destruction; the righteous see their salvation from the wicked. This is not unique to their judgment. In the flood of Noah's time, the wicked and righteous again saw the same event entirely differently. The wicked saw its destruction, while the same flood was the salvation of the righteous as the same water that destroyed the wicked carried the righteous to a new world order after the flood. This passage is alluded to in Hebrews 10:30-31 to describe a first century judgment of Old Covenant Israel.

Jesus speaks of this same vengeance of God on Old Covenant Israel in Lk. 21.20-24, when he says:

> But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand. Then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains; and let them that are in the midst of her depart out; and let not them that are in the country enter therein. For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. Woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! for there shall be great distress upon the land, and wrath unto this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led captive into all the nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

"All things that are written may be fulfilled" would certainly include the prophecy of God's vengeance on Old Covenant Israel, as well as the vindication of the righteous and the taking of the gospel to the Gentiles.

Further Indications of Imminent Judgment in the Gospels

Lk. 11.45-51

In this passage, Jesus has just confronted some Jews for their traditions, and one of their lawyers took umbrage, perhaps thinking Jesus would back off his accusation:

> 45 And one of the lawyers answering saith unto him, Teacher, in saying this thou reproachest us also. 46 And he said, Woe unto you lawyers also! for ye load men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers. 47 Woe unto you! for ye build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. 48 So ye are witnesses and consent unto the works of your fathers: for they killed them, and ye build their tombs. 49 Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send unto them prophets and apostles; and some of them they shall kill and persecute; 50 that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; 51 from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zachariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary: yea, I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation.

In verse 48, Jesus shows that since these Jews consented with their ancestors' treatment of the prophets, they were actually in fellowship with their evil deeds! Consenting with evil constitutes fellowship with it. Paul, in Rom. 1.32, affirms that even Gentiles were held responsible for such sinful consenting with evildoers, and these were people who didn't even know of God or his revealed will. How much more responsible were God's covenant people for such fellowship with sin. Because of this, Jesus' audience ("this generation") was going to be held responsible for the victims of their wicked ancestors. Later on, in our discussion of Mt. 23.33-36, we'll see that they would be judged *in* their own generation.

Lk. 12.49-56

This passage foretells a coming judgment on this generation of Jews in their present time.

> 49 I came to cast fire upon the earth [lit., land—SGD]; and what do I desire, if it is already kindled? 50 But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! 51 Think ye that I am come to give peace in the earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: 52 for there shall be from henceforth five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. 53 They shall be divided, father

> against son, and son against father; mother against daughter, and daughter against her mother; mother in law against her daughter in law, and daughter in law against her mother in law. 54 And he said to the multitudes also, When ye see a cloud rising in the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it cometh to pass. 55 And when (ye see) a south wind blowing, ye say, There will be a scorching heat; and it cometh to pass. 56 Ye hypocrites, ye know how to interpret the face of the earth and the heaven; but how is it that ye know not how to interpret *this time* [emphasis mine—SGD]?

Malachi had foretold that the Messiah would bring a curse upon the land of Israel (4.6). Here Jesus specifies that the curse he will bring on the land will be fiery. He then upbraids them for being able to forecast rainy weather, and heat spells, but that they can't see what's to happen to them *in their own time*, implying that his judgment on the isn't a long way off, and certainly not at the end of time, but in their own present time!

Lk. 13.3

In this passage, Jesus again warns of impending judgment on the Jews:

> 1 Now there were some present at that very season who told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And he answered and said unto them, Think ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they have suffered these things? 3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish. 4 Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, think ye that they were offenders above all the men that dwell in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, Nay: but, *except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

Many religious folks believe that great suffering on the part of God's people is an indicator of great sin. Job's three friends, when they heard of his suffering, suspected that Job was a great sinner, although God had said in Job 1 that he was an upright man. However, since Job's friends thought that his great suffering indicated that he was a

great sinner, when they came to encourage him, could not because they didn't want to be endorsing his sin. The Jews in Jesus' audience evidently thought the same way, as Jesus questions why they thought some Galileans that Pilate had killed, or others who had suffered at the collapse of a tower were terrible sinners. He then denied that they were worse sinners that the Jews to whom he spoke, and asserted that unless they repented, they would suffer similar destruction. They would be judged shortly in the end of Old Covenant Israel, foretold by Moses, Malachi, John the Baptist, and now by the Messiah himself.

With absolutely no regard for the context, this passage has often been used to teach people who would become Christians to repent. Jesus wasn't telling them what to do to become Christians, for there were none yet, and he certainly wasn't giving instruction for us to use to evangelize the lost.

Lk. 13.6-9

> 6 And he spake this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit thereon, and found none. 7 And he said unto the vinedresser, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why doth it also cumber the ground? 8 And he answering saith unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: 9 and if it bear fruit thenceforth, well; but if not, thou shalt cut it down.

The author, raised in the Texas panhandle where trees are so scarce that there hardly is one that wasn't planted by a white man, treasured any tree that could give shade from the Texas heat. Our lord isn't that desperate. He expected fruit from his trees, and deemed worthless those that are fruitless. In the Old Testament, he had depicted Israel as his choice tree, from which he expected fruit. This parable depicts Old Covenant Israel as his tree, from which he had expected fruit, but found none. Jesus' parable teaches that if Israel didn't finally produce the fruit of righteousness, it would be destroyed, as a warning of upcoming judgment on their nation.

Mt. 13.24-30, 36-42 – Parable of the Tares

> 24 Another parable set he before them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man that sowed good seed in his field: 25 but while men slept, his en-

> emy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. 26 But when the blade sprang up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. 27 And the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? whence then hath it tares? 28 And he said unto them, An enemy hath done this. And the servants say unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? 29 But he saith, Nay; lest haply while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

This harvest is the same theme foreseen by Malachi and John the Baptist. The imminence of it comes in Jesus' teaching when his disciples ask him further about this parable in vv. 36-42:

> 36 Then he left the multitudes, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Explain unto us the parable of the tares of the field. 37 And he answered and said, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; 38 and the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; 39 and the enemy that sowed them is the devil: and *the harvest is the end of the world* [*aionios*, lit., age—SGD]; and the reapers are angels. 40 As therefore the tares are gathered up and burned with fire; so shall it be in the end of the world [*aionios*, lit., age—SGD]. 41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, 42 and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

Jesus says that the harvest he's speaking of will be at the end of the age, not the end of time nor the end of the planet. The Jews to whom he spoke recognized two ages (and Jews still do): the age in which they lived, the Mosaic age, and the Messiah's age. Jews who don't recog-

nize Jesus as the Messiah believe they are still in the Mosaic age, and when the Messiah comes, his age will began.

Jesus respected the Jewish usage of these terms in Mt. 12.31-32 when he said:

> 31 Therefore I say unto you, Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. 32 And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world [*aionios*, lit., age—SGD] nor in that which is to come.

"This age" would be the Mosaic age; Jesus says that blaspheming the Holy Spirit wouldn't be forgiven in the Mosaic age, nor in the age to come, the Messianic (or Christian) age.

Likewise, in Lk. 20.27-35, when responding to the question from the Sadducees concerning marriage in the resurrection, Jesus used this same distinction:

> 27 And there came to him certain of the Sadducees, they that say that there is no resurrection; 28 and they asked him, saying, Teacher, Moses wrote unto us, that if a man's brother die, having a wife, and he be childless, his brother should take the wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. 29 There were therefore seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and died childless; 30 and the second: 31 and the third took her; and likewise the seven also left no children, and died. 32 Afterward the woman also died. 33 In the resurrection therefore whose wife of them shall she be? for the seven had her to wife. 34 And Jesus said unto them, The sons of this world [*aionios*, lit., age—SGD] marry, and are given in marriage: 35 but they that are accounted worthy to attain that world [*aionios*, lit., age—SGD], and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage:

In the Mosaic age, in which every character in this conversation lived, citizens of the kingdom were produced by marriage and procreation. In the case of the woman involved, she had no children after five marriages. This was of utmost seriousness in the Mosaic age, as chil-

dren of the kingdom were produced solely by physical procreation. Eunuchs, for example, could produce no heirs in the kingdom, and they were regarded as inferior citizens because of this.

However, Jesus says, that won't be the case in the Messiah's age. Children of God will not be produced by physical procreation, but by teaching the gospel. Now, in the Messiah's age, we know that to be the case. Christians are produced by evangelism, not procreation. Imagine the effect this teaching would have on eunuchs (such as the Ethyopian in Acts 8) or unmarried people now: they can produce citizens and heirs of God's kingdom as well as anyone else!

The Age of Christ Has no End

We next notice that the Messianic age has no end. In the Messianic prophecy of Isa. 9.6, 7, God foretold:

> 6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. 7 There will be *no end to the increase of His government or of peace*, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

This prophecy of the Messiah also says that there will be no end to the increase of his government or of peace. The increase of the Messiah's government takes place, again, through preaching the gospel, and it has no end.

Similarly in Lk. 1.28-33, we find the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary, saying:

> 28 And he came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee. 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this might be. 30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. 31 And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. 32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: 33

> and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and *of his kingdom there shall be no end.*

Again, the kingdom of the Messiah will never end. One had just as well talk about the end of eternity as the end of the Messiah's rule. It will never end!

Hence, the Age of Christ or the Messiah's age has no end. The Mosaic age did. The Messiah's age has no last days, last day, nor last hour. The Mosaic age had all of those, and they are spoken of repeatedly. Thus, when these parables speak of the end of the age, they're not speaking of the end of the Christian age, which has no end, but the end of the Mosaic age, the age in which Jesus' audience lived. The harvest and judgment of which Jesus spoke to his countrymen would occur at the end of the Mosaic age.

Mt. 13.47-50 – Parable of the Net

We see this same teaching in the parable of the net in Mt. 13.47-50:

> 47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: 48 which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach; and they sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but the bad they cast away. 49 So shall it be in the end of the world [*aionios*, lit., age—SGD] the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the righteous, 50 and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

Here again Jesus speaks of a judgment between good and bad in God's kingdom at the end of the age, with the bad to be cast away in a fiery destruction. This is precisely what is going to happen to the unbelievers in Old Covenant Israel.

Mk. 9.1, Mt. 16.27-28

In Mk. 9.1, Jesus says concerning his kingdom:

> And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There are some here of them that stand by, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power.

This is a verse frequently and comfortably used in churches of Christ of the author's background. It shows that the kingdom of Christ was coming during the lifetimes of those in his Jewish audience. Did that happen, or do we have some mighty old disciples around? Or, was Jesus mistaken, a false prophet? We're comfortable emphasizing that if the Messiah's kingdom didn't happen during his disciples' lifetimes, then Jesus was a false prophet, and he deserved to be put to death according to the Mosaic Law under which he lived. In short, we're extremely confident in our use of this verse.

Are we as comfortable with its parallel in Matthew? In Mt. 16.27-28, Jesus said:

> 27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds. 28 Verily I say unto you, there are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

Here, Jesus says he would come in the glory of his father with the angels while some of his disciples were still alive, and that he would judge, rendering to every man according to his deeds in the same time frame.

Did this happen? Or do we have some awfully old disciples around? Or, was Jesus mistaken, a false prophet? Are we as confident that if this wasn't fulfilled as Jesus said, that he was a false prophet, justifying his crucifixion? If this wasn't fulfilled, Jesus was a false prophet, no better than the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith, and deserved to be put to death.

"But wait," someone will say, "that was speaking of the transfiguration, the next event we read of in Matthew 17." Yet there's no marvel that some of Jesus' disciples would still remain alive after only 6 days (Mt. 17.1). Also, there was no element of judgment in the Transfiguration, or at Pentecost, where most believe that Mk. 9.1 was fulfilled.

No, this is the same coming in judgment we began with in Malachi, of which John the Baptist warned, and which Jesus foretold in terms of imminence. Not at the "end of time," nor at the "end of the planet," but at the end of the Mosaic age.

Jesus said that he would come in the glory of his father, that is, the glory that his father had come with many times in the Old Testament,

though the father had never come physically, nor bodily. For example, in Isa. 19.1 we read:

> The oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud, and is about to come to Egypt; The idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence, And the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them.

Here is God coming on a cloud down to Egypt, not speaking of God coming physically, bodily, or geographically to Egypt, but through his instruments Assyria and Babylon.

We see a similar example in Jer. 4.13, where Jeremiah warns of God's coming in judgment on Judah using Babylon's horses:

> Behold, he goes up like clouds, And his chariots like the whirlwind; His horses are swifter than eagles Woe to us, for we are ruined!"

In Mic. 1.3, 6 we see a similar example of God coming against Samaria:

> 3 For behold, the LORD is coming forth from His place. He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth 6 For I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the open country,

Jesus affirmed that he would be coming in the same way his father had come, in glory, on clouds of judgment, on Old Covenant Israel.

Mt. 21.33-45 – Parable of the Vineyard

> 33 Hear another parable: There was a man that was a householder, who planted a vineyard, and set a hedge about it, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into another country. 34 And when the season of the fruits drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, to receive his fruits. 35 And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them in like manner. 37 But afterward he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. 38 But the husbandmen, when they saw the son, said among themselves, This is the heir;

> come, let us kill him, and take his inheritance. 39 And they took him, and cast him forth out of the vineyard, and killed him. 40 When therefore the lord of the vineyard shall come, what will he do unto those husbandmen? 41 They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits in their seasons. 42 Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, The same was made the head of the corner; This was from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes? 43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. 44 And he that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust. 45 And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, *they perceived that he spake of them* [emphasis mine—SGD].

He spake of them, not just anyone, not us, not just theoretical teaching, but he spake of them. They had killed the prophets. They were going to kill the son, Jesus himself. They will be miserably destroyed and the vineyard will be given to others, Gentiles.

Mt. 22.1-14 – Parable of the Wedding Feast

> And Jesus answered and spake again in parables unto them, saying, 2 The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son, 3 and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast: and they would not come. 4 Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them that are bidden, Behold, I have made ready my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come to the marriage feast. 5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise; 6 and the rest laid hold on his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7 *But the king was wroth; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.* 8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is

> ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy. 9 Go ye therefore unto the partings of the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage feast. 10 And those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was filled with guests. 11 But when the king came in to behold the guests, he saw there a man who had not on a wedding-garment: 12 and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and cast him out into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. 14 For many are called, but few chosen.

Notice that after the king vented his wrath and destroyed their city, he went right on with the wedding. This is what we see in Revelation 18-19. Chapter 18 describes the destruction of the harlot city, Old Covenant Jerusalem (Rev. 11.8 – where their Lord was crucified), and chapter 19 proceeds with the wedding feast.

Mt. 23.29-36

In Mt. 23.29-36, Jesus prosecutes the case against Old Covenant Jerusalem for killing the prophets, and foretells her imminent punishment in his generation:

> 29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and garnish the tombs of the righteous, 30 and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. 31 Wherefore ye witness to yourselves, that ye are sons of them that slew the prophets. 32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. 33 Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell? 34 Therefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: some of them shall ye kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city: 35 that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous unto the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom ye slew

> between the sanctuary and the altar. 36 Verily I say unto you, *All these things shall come upon this generation.*

Note in particular "these things" and "this generation." Both these terms will figure significantly in our interpretation of the Olivet Discourse, to which we now proceed.

Appendix 2

The Olivet Discourse

> And when he drew nigh, he saw the city and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known in this day, even thou, the things which belong unto peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, when thine enemies shall cast up a bank about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall dash thee to the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. (Jesus, as he approached Jerusalem the last week of His life, Lk. 19.41-44).

This chapter examines one of the most difficult, perplexing, abused, and misapplied passages of scripture in all the Bible, the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters of Matthew. As one of the most difficult, it suffers the most speculative interpretations, and many religious leaders base their false doctrines upon it. For example, this chapter is the starting place for many false teachings propagated today about a final end-of-time return of Christ. It is also the favorite ground of many who hold to false theories about the Kingdom of Christ. The Worldwide Church of God, founded by Herbert W. Armstrong, and Jehovah's Witnesses use the passage to substantiate their teachings about their organization and a final end-of-time coming of Christ. It is also the basis for Hal Lindsey's popular *The Late Great Planet Earth.*

Contrariwise, our Mormon friends take a different approach. When they challenge us to show that Joseph Smith was not a prophet of God, we use authoritative Mormon sources that admit his prophecies were not fulfilled at all, much less at the time Smith foretold. Folks reading

these prophecies often say, "Don't Mormons know these prophecies are false?" Sure they do, but they assert what they think is a Biblical argument to show it's no big deal. They claim Jesus also made prophecies, including a time element, that weren't fulfilled. Can you guess which ones they have in mind? Matthew 24!

So was Jesus mistaken as a false prophet, just like Joseph Smith? Mormons assume Smith was every bit on par with Jesus—both were mistaken! How about you? Do you think it's a big deal if Jesus couldn't make accurate prophecies about time elements? To explore other material on such prophecies, please see Chapter 11, "Was Joseph Smith a Prophet of God?" in the author's *Denominational Doctrines: Explained, Examined, & Exposed* [Bowie, TX: SGD Press, 2010].

In addition, Jewish and Muslim skeptics, as well as prominent atheists, deny that Jesus was a prophet of God based on Matthew 24. For a full discussion of this point, please see Chapter 19, "The Faithless Basis of Dispensational Premillennialism" in the author's *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things.*

Matthew 24 has also suffered at the hands of liberal theologians, who think Jesus taught the imminence of an end-of-time return.

One modernist, David Strauss, summed the matter up this way:

> Jesus at first speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem and farther on, and until the close, of his return at the end of all things, and that he places the two events in immediate connection. (David Strauss, *Life of Jesus, Vol. III*, translated by George Eliot [New York: MacMillan & Co., 1898], cited by J. Marcellus Kik, *Matthew Twenty-Four* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1948], p. vii.)

From this viewpoint of the chapter, Strauss came to the same conclusion many theologians of our time have, which is that the "announcement of Jesus appears so far to have been erroneous." (*Ibid.*, p. 85.) Another modernist, C. C. McCown wrote:

> Either Jesus is mistaken or these discourses are not from him. The Christian church cannot without disloyalty escape this dilemma. (C. C. McCown, *The Search for the Real Jesus* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940], pp. 243-244, cited by J. Marcellus Kik,

> *Matthew Twenty-Four* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1948], p. vii.)

An outstandingly influential German modernist, Rudolf Bultmann, made many frank statements about Jesus' teaching not being worthy of trust on eschatology, the study of "last things" including Christ's return, the resurrection, and the judgment. Bultmann wrote:

> The problem of eschatology grew out of the fact that the expected end of the world failed to arrive, that the "Son of man" did not appear in the clouds of heaven, that history went on, and that the eschatological community could not fail to recognize that it had become a historical phenomenon and that the Christian faith had taken on the shape of a new religion. (Rudoph Bultmann, *History and Eschatology: the Presence of Eternity* [Harper and Bro-thers New York, 1957], p. 38.)

Then Bultmann said:

> The mythical eschatology is untenable for the simple reason that the parousia [coming or presence—SGD] of Christ never took place as the New Testament expected. History did not come to an end, and, as every school-boy knows, it will continue to run its course. The problem of Eschatology grew out of the fact that the expected end of the world failed to arrive, that the "Son of Man" did not appear in the clouds of heaven. (*Ibid.*)

Bultmann thought Jesus had spread myths because he didn't know any more about the future than a schoolboy. These words came from a man claiming to be a Christian scholar. Through his extensive writings, he's influenced millions of lifelong Bible students and preachers, yet he sounds like an atheist or a skeptic, doesn't he? Surely, if you claim to be a Christian, this probably isn't the view you have of Jesus.

Obviously, modernist scholars who make such statements believe that (1) Jesus was wrong, and (2) they know better than the Son of God himself. However, we're going to learn that (3) many felt that they had to rescue Jesus from the problem he deluded himself into. I doubt that you believe you know better than Jesus or that you have to rescue him.

Why Would These Men Continue to Be Bible Scholars?

The question arises: Why would men continue to devote their lives to studying the word of a God who cannot maintain his own sovereignty or carry out his own will? Why study the Bible that says God makes his plans and no one can frustrate them, when they don't believe it? Why assert their faith in a God who says there is no God like him and he will accomplish all his good pleasure, when they declare that Christ's church wasn't even in God's plan, but an amendment only necessary because of Jesus's failure to establish his kingdom the only time he ever tried to bring it about?

In their view, God is no more trustworthy than an idol who couldn't bring about his will! Why set themselves forth as experts on the teaching of Christ when they think Jesus was a mistaken sap who didn't know any more than a schoolboy who, as he was being delivered up, mocked, killed, and rising on the third day, claimed he was fulfilling all things written through the prophets? Why devote their lives to studying the teaching of such a self-deceived man?

How ridiculous that these men claim to be "fundamentalists" or "literalists"! Surely, men who don't believe Jesus' prophecies any more than they do are anything but literalists or fundamentalists! Likewise, how preposterous that they call themselves "evangelical" (the word from which "gospel" comes) if the good news is that Jesus and all his apostles were mistaken! How arrogant to assert that Jesus was mistaken, and then claim to be a fundamentalist! What conceit and egotism that would be!

How much are you and I willing to study the writings of anyone we know is a false prophet? These men pretend to be scholars of the teaching of Christ; when in reality, they think his teachings are mythological! Dare we place our confidence in the attempts of modernist scholars to help Jesus overcome the Jews thwarting his plan to establish his kingdom?

Background of Matthew 24

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24 took place in the last two to three days of his life. He had returned to Jerusalem for the last time before his death and, in chapter 23, Jesus had just completely denounced the religious leadership of the Jewish nation. In verses 13-16, 23, 25, 27, 29, Jesus pronounced various woes upon these hypocritical Jewish

teachers. He called them fools, blind guides, offspring of vipers, etc. In verses 38-39, Jesus stood in the temple in Jerusalem and made the statement, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate, For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." With those words, he walked from the temple, having pronounced it not God's house, but strictly as the religious operation of those tradition-bound Jewish leaders. In chapter 24, as Jesus and his apostles walked out of the temple, the conversation of interest in this study occurs.

A Review of Views of Matthew 24

Before we study the chapter itself, it would be well to look at the various views taken by those in the religious world about this controversial chapter. Most view it as composed of two subjects, the destruction of Jerusalem and an end-of-time return of Christ. The most popular position is the "verse 36 position," which applies everything in the first thirty-five verses of Matthew 24 to the destruction of Jerusalem. Then, verses 36 through 44 apply to a final end-of-time return of Christ.

The second most popular view is the "verse 29 position." Many read verse 29 and 30 (where Jesus spoke of the sun darkened, the moon with no light, and the stars fallen from heaven), and feel those verses can't possibly have been fulfilled. Thus, they think the break between the two subjects takes place at that point.

Another popular position is the "oscillating position." Those who hold it believe that Jesus switched back and forth between the subjects of the destruction of Jerusalem and his final return. Louis Berkhof, in his *Systematic Theology*, referred to Mt. 24.5-14, 21-22, 29-31 as a description of events that must take place shortly before a final return of Christ. Thus, the interceding verses refer to the destruction of Jerusalem.

The Position Which Will Be Set Forth Here

The position which will be set forth herein is that Matthew 24 does *not* deal with two subjects at all, but is in its entirety, concerned with the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus, no transition occurred anywhere in the chapter where Jesus began to speak about an end-of-time coming. It is our responsibility in the remainder of this study to present those evidences from the Bible that show that the apostles did not ask Jesus

about a end-of-time return at that time, and that Jesus didn't deal with that subject.

Analysis of the Apostles' Questions

Matthew 24.1-3 gives the most complete account of the questions of the apostles as they walked with Jesus out of the temple after his denunciation of the religious leadership of the Jews:

> And Jesus went out from the temple, and was going on his way; and his disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the temple. But he answered and said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat on the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world.

Of course, understanding the apostles' questions is important to discerning Jesus' answer. It's easy for some to assume from the words "end of the world" that the disciples were asking about the destruction of the planet, since plainly, any destruction of the temple with its huge stones, could only take place in the context of universal destruction. Calvin stated that the disciples: "did not suppose that while the building of this world stood, the temple could fall to ruins." (John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, (Grand Rapids; AP and A, vol. 7), 462). That is too easy an assumption since the Jews knew the temple had been destroyed before (586 BC) by the Babylonians, and that destruction hadn't required the destruction of the planet. The teaching of Matthew 24 is plainly in response to their questions. A comparison of the three gospel accounts aids this understanding:

Mk. 13.4

> ...Tell us, *when* shall these things be...?

Lk. 21.7

> ...Teacher, *when* therefore shall these things be?

Mt. 24.3

> ...Tell us, *when* shall these things be...?

In the first question that the apostles asked in all three accounts, "these things" referred to the same things Jesus had just told the apostles. This was the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem (See Mt. 24.2, "See ye not all these things?" and Mt. 24.34, "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished.").

As we compare the second part of their questions, we find:

Mk. 13.4

> ...and what shall be *the sign* when these things are all about to be accomplished?

Lk. 21.7

> ...and what shall be *the sign* when these things are about to come to pass?

Mt. 24.3

> ...and what shall be *the sign* of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

Notice carefully two facts about the apostles' questions. First, in all three accounts, the apostles asked for two things, (1) a time, and (2) a sign. Now see the five-fold use of the expression "these things" in the three accounts. All agree that in the first question, this expression referred to the destruction of Jerusalem. Grammar demands that the same expression referred to the same things in the second part of their questions. Observe also that in Mark's and Luke's accounts, the second part of their question concerned "the sign when these things" were about to be fulfilled. Obviously, the sign when Christ would fulfill these things had to refer to the same things alluded to in the earlier question, the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus, the sign that concerned the apostles was about the destruction of Jerusalem. Since the apostles asked for one sign, the sign about which they asked in Mt. 24.3 must be the same sign as recorded in Mark and Luke. Our contention is that Jesus used "these things" consistently five times to denote the destruction of Jerusalem and that the sign they asked about was about these same things.

First, most folks, hearing the words "end of the world," think immediately of the end of the planet or an end of time. The word for world here is *aionios*, from which our word "aeon" or era comes. It denotes a period of time, not the planet.

Second, the disciples most certainly did not ask Jesus about the end of time, for the Bible nowhere in the entire Bible uses that expression.

The closest passage might be Dan. 12.4, which the NASV mistakenly translates as "the end of time." The ASV translates it as "the time of the end," as do the KJV, NIV, and the NKJV, among others. The expressions "time of the end" and "the end of time" reflect two vastly different concepts. One supposes the end of time itself (on which the popular view of the resurrection is based), and the other speaks of the time of "the end," the end of the age. In Daniel's context, the age ends with the destruction of Jerusalem and her temple.

Third, when his disciples asked Jesus about the end of the age, of what age were they speaking? The disciples, including even modern Jews, recognized two ages, the Mosaic age, and the age to come, i.e., the age of the Messiah. Jesus even spoke of "this age" and "the age to come" (Mt. 12.31-32, Mk. 10.29-31, Lk. 20.34-35). At the time Matthew 24 was given, "this age" was the Mosaic age. The end of the age here must refer to the end of the Mosaic age, the age in which Jesus and his disciples lived, as the Messiah's age has no end, nor any last days.

Thus, the term "last days" in the gospels refers to the last days of the Mosaic age, not the last days of the Christian age, nor the end of time. There are a few modern translations that give "end of time" for "time of the end," but as we'll see later, those are entirely different concepts.

Further, on the use of the term "last days," failure to recognize that it refers to the last days of the Mosaic age leads many to think that the last days stretch from Pentecost till the end of time, or that there are two sets of last days, one at Pentecost, and another at the end of time. This presumption leads to doctrines of two sets of last days, two days of the Lord, two comings of the Lord in the clouds, two gatherings together of the faithful, two great tribulations, two ends, two comings as a thief, and all sorts of doctrines attempting to deal with dual fulfillments of all these concepts. We've not had 2000 years of last days of the Mosaic age, nor a 2000-year gap between the last days of Pentecost and some end of time. The last days referred to the time from the com-

ing of John the Baptist until Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.

The End of the Christian Age?

Though we many times think "the end" Jesus spoke of refers to the end of the Christian age; in reality, *the Christian age has no end.* For example, in Isa. 9.6-7, Isaiah prophesied the endlessness of the Messiah's rule:

> For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be *no end to the increase of His government* [accomplished by evangelization—SGD] or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

Likewise, in Lk. 1.31-33, Gabriel told Mary of the endlessness of the Messiah's reign:

> And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and *he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.*

Thus, the term "end of the age" in Jesus' teaching never referred to the end of the Christian age, which has no end. Instead, it foretold the end of the Mosaic age. Similarly, the term "last days" never refers to the last days of the Christian age; again, because the Christian age has no end, hence no last days, last day, nor last hour. However, the Mosaic age had all of those, because it had an end. Jesus spoke of it here, and all the Jews understood, that it was the end of the Mosaic age.

Notice, were it not for Matthew's account of the apostles' questions, no idea of a final return of Christ nor the end of time would enter our minds. However, Matthew's account used the expressions "com-

ing" and "end of the world" which may suggest such a final end-of-time return to some. An examination of other passages where Bible writers use these same expressions will lead us to perhaps a different conclusion.

For example, Heb. 9.26 used the same expression, when the writer of Hebrews said:

> ...else must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once at the *end of the ages* [emphasis mine—SGD] hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

The expression "at the end of the ages," which referred to the incarnation of Christ, comes from the same Greek expression used in Mt. 24.3. It means, literally, "the consummation of the age." Christ was offered at his first coming as the completion or consummation of the plan of God through all the ages to redeem humanity.

Second, Paul used the same expression in I Cor. 10.11, where he spoke of the value of the Old Testament scriptures to New Testament Christians:

> Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the *ends of the ages* are come.

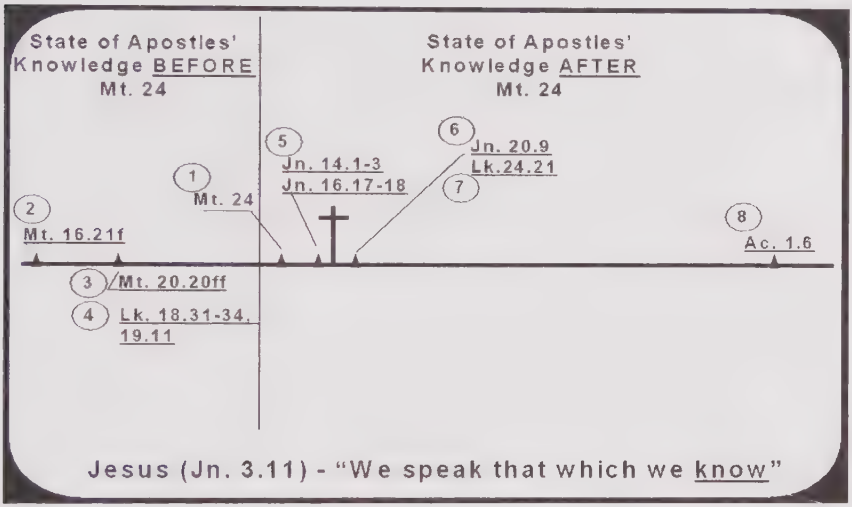
Again, the expression referred not to a final end-of-time return of Christ, but to the Messianic age in which we now live. Thus, the age they asked about in Mt. 24.3 was the age when "these things" would occur. Later in the discourse, we'll see that Jesus said, "this generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished" (Mt. 24.34). He gave these warnings, "that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Lk. 21.36).

Since the language of the apostles' questions didn't demand that they asked about a final end-of-time return of Christ, we now want to see that *the apostles wouldn't have asked about a such a return of Christ from heaven because, at that time, they didn't believe Jesus planned to go away.*

As we noted earlier, the apostles asked these questions in the last week of Jesus' life. At that time, they didn't have all the truth. In Jn. 16.12, spoken only a few days after Matthew 24, Jesus told the apostles: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them

now." As we are about to show in detail, the apostles could not have asked about a final return because, at that time, they didn't even believe in the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

From Figure 1, we want to discuss in chronological order several passages, which show the improbability that the apostles asked Jesus about a final return in Mt. 24.3:



Matthew 24:

As noticed earlier in this material, this discussion between Jesus and his apostles occurred two or three days before his death.

Passages Which Occur Chronologically Before Matthew 24

2. Mt. 16.21, 22:

> From that time began Jesus to show unto his disciples that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee.

In this passage, spoken at least six months before Jesus died, Jesus plainly told his disciples he would die and be resurrected. As Peter's

response shows, they did not realize the significance of Jesus' teaching, and weren't aware he was returning to heaven at that time. They did not expect Jesus to go away. At that time, they still expected Jesus to set up a nationalistic, militaristic kingdom, as the following passage shows:

3. Mt. 20.20-22:

> Then came to him the mother of the sons of Zebedee with her sons, worshiping him, and asking a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wouldest thou? She saith unto him, Command that these my two sons may sit, one on thy right hand, and one on thy left hand, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask.

This passage illustrates again that the apostles and the other disciples didn't realize Jesus wouldn't set up a physical kingdom on the earth. Nor did they realize he would die, be resurrected, and go back to heaven. This shows they would not have asked about a return from heaven at this interval shortly before Matthew 24.

4. Lk. 18.31-34, 19.11:

> And he took unto him the twelve; and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written through the prophets shall be accomplished unto the Son of man, for he shall be delivered up unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and shamefully treated, and spit upon: and they shall scourge and kill him: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things; and this saying was hid from them, and they perceived not the things that were said.

As Jesus and the apostles approached the city of Jerusalem in this same context (Lk. 19.11):

> And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was immediately to appear.

Both these passages show that within one week of the time of the Matthew 24 discourse, the apostles still believed Jesus would set up a theocracy with its headquarters in Jerusalem. They did not believe he would go away. They did not believe in a final end-of-time return just a few days before they questioned Jesus in Mt. 24.3.

Passages Which Occur Chronologically After Matthew 24

5. Jn. 14.1-3; 16.16-18: In the first of these passages, spoken the night before Jesus was put to death, Jesus told the apostles:

> Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you: for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

Here, Jesus plainly told the apostles that it was necessary for him to go away. They resolutely refused to believe it, because this teaching did not fit with their idea of the kingdom. This is especially evident in the following passage, which was spoken on the same night, the night before Jesus was crucified:

Jn. 16.16-18: Jesus said to the apostles:

> ...A little while, and ye behold me no more; and again a little while, and ye shall see me. Some of his disciples therefore said one to another, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall see me; and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? We know not what he saith.

Thus, Jesus plainly told them the absolute necessity of his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. We have the testimony of the apostles themselves that they didn't know what he was talking about. They didn't expect Jesus to go away the night before he died. They would not have asked about a return from heaven, which they, at that time, didn't believe in.

These passages of scripture show conclusively that both shortly *before* Matthew 24 took place and shortly *after* Matthew 24 took place,

the apostles didn't expect Jesus to go away. Therefore, they didn't understand anything about a return from heaven. Because of this, they would not have asked about a final return *in* Matthew 24.

Three other passages show this even further:

6. Jn. 20.9: This passage relates the discovery of the empty tomb by Peter and John on the day of Jesus' resurrection:

> For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must arise again from the dead.

Though Jesus had taught the apostles that he would die, be resurrected, and go back to the father, they still didn't believe it. This was the very day of his resurrection.

7. Lk. 24.21: On the day Jesus was raised from the dead, the two disciples who didn't recognize Jesus on the road to Emmaus talked with him, and said:

> But we hoped that it was he who should redeem Israel. Yea and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things came to pass.

These two had lost hope that Jesus was the Messiah and now looked elsewhere for their Messiah. Jesus reproved them in vv25-27:

> ...O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Behooved it not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

Because of these considerations, the statement of Hal Lindsey in his popular *The Late Great Planet Earth*, a shallow presentation of premillennial doctrines and a perversion based upon Matthew 24, appears absurd in the extreme. Of the questions asked by the apostles, Lindsey said:

> The "coming" referred to in the question above is commonly referred to as the second advent of Christ. *It was only natural that they wanted to know what signs would indicate his return to set up God's prom-*

> *ised kingdom* [emphasis mine—SGD]. (Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970], p. 52.)

Thus, we not only see that the language of the questions doesn't demand that they asked about a final end-of-time return, but the apostles' knowledge at that time demands that they did not ask about one. They simply didn't believe Jesus was about to go away! They simply asked about the close of the age in which they lived. Since they weren't asking about a return from heaven, I believe they referred to the coming of Mal. 3-4 and Mt. 16.27-28, as we discussed in the previous chapter.

We now want to see that Jesus' answer cannot be in reference to a return from heaven. This supports the position that the entire chapter of Matthew 24 deals with the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Roman general Titus in A.D. 70.

A Brief Commentary on Matthew 24.4-44

Verses 4-5: And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man lead you astray. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am the Christ; and shall lead many astray.

First, notice that when Jesus warns "let no lead you astray," who was the "you"? It was the disciples who had questioned him, wasn't it? It was the ones he had said in Mt. 16.27-28 would still be alive when he returned, not people living in the 21st century. These "you"s will occur many times in Matthew 24-25, and while we won't comment on each of them, not a one of them refers to people living in modern times. It behooves us to establish the relation of these words to the people to whom these words were spoken.

These verses were abundantly fulfilled at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. The Jewish historian Josephus (*Wars, VI*, 5, 2) testified that the land was overrun with magicians, seducers, and impostors, who drew the people after them in multitudes into solitudes and deserts, to see the signs and miracles which they promised to show by the power of God. Note that Jesus begins to predict a first-century apostasy among his disciples: many shall be led astray. He'll have much more to say about this later on (vv10-12), and both Peter (II Peter 3) and Paul (I Thes. 5.3, II Thes. 2.3-12) will have more to say about it in their epistles.

Verses 6-8: And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for these things must needs come to pass; but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines, and earthquakes in divers places. But all these things are the beginning of travail.

Jesus affirms that wars and rumors of wars weren't the sign of his coming. Actually, they couldn't serve as such a sign because there were so many of them. There were wars between Rome and her enemies. There were wars between Rome and the Jews. There were wars among the Jews. In addition, wars involving neither Rome nor the Jews often affected the Jews as they lived in the crossroads of the Mediterranean world.

In particular, the history of Rome records the most violent agitations prevailed in the Roman Empire previous to the destruction of Jerusalem. Four emperors: Nero, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius suffered violent deaths, in the short space of eighteen months. Can you imagine the instability of our society if we had four Presidents assassinated in a year and a half? Josephus (*Wars, IV*, 9, 2) said that Bardanes, and after him Volageses, declared war against the Jews, but it was not executed. He also said that Vitellius, governor of Syria, declared war against Aretas, king of Arabia, and wished to lead his army through Palestine, but the death of Tiberius prevented the war.

With cable television reporting everything that happens from car chases in Los Angeles to floods and earthquakes around the world, folks often think more catastrophes than ever before are hitting us. We frequently hear, "There sure have been a lot of earthquakes lately. Don't you think that's a sign of the end in our time?" Michael Crichton, writer and filmmaker, addressed the issue of whether we are experiencing more earthquakes:

> Is this really the end of the world? Earthquakes, hurricanes, floods?
>
> No, we simply live on an active planet. Earthquakes are continuous, a million and a half of them every year, or three every minute. A Richter 5 quake every six hours, a major quake every 3 weeks. A quake as destructive as the one in Pakistan every 8 months. It's nothing new, it's right on schedule.

> At any moment there are 1,500 electrical storms on the planet. A tornado touches down every six hours. We have ninety hurricanes a year, or one every four days. Again, right on schedule. Violent, disruptive, chaotic activity is a constant feature of our globe.
>
> Is this the end of the world? No: this is the world. (Michael Chricton, "Earthquakes: Fear and Complexity" [San Francisco, CA: The Independent Institute, November 15, 2005].)

It's time we knew it. Perhaps this realization will help us not sensationalize the great number of earthquakes occurring at all times on our planet. Obviously, earthquakes were so prevalent that Jesus points out that they couldn't be a sign of his coming.

Verses 9-10: Then shall they deliver you up into tribulation, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all the nations for my name's sake. And then shall many stumble, and shall deliver up one another, and shall hate one another.

This tribulation took place before the end of the age, the Mosaic age. Nowadays, when people ask, "Don't you think the tribulation is about here?" We say, "Jesus said the tribulation would occur before the end of the Mosaic age, in his generation." This teaching parallels that of Jesus in Jn. 15.20, 21 when he said to the apostles: "Remember the word that I said unto you, A servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me."

Many stumbling, delivering up and hating one another indicates apostasy on the part of many of the faithful. Persecution will turn them against each other. In a few verses, Jesus will make the magnitude of that apostasy clear.

Verse 11: And many false prophets shall arise, and shall lead many astray.

Note that Jesus again foretells many of his believers will be led astray, a further warning of apostasy in the first century. Josephus, in his history of the destruction of Jerusalem, gave this account:

> Now, there was then a great number of false prophets suborned by the tyrants to impose upon the people, who denounced this to them, that they should wait for deliverance from God; and this was in order to keep them from deserting, and that they might be buoyed up above fear and care by such hopes. (Flavius Josephus, *Complete Works, VI*, 5, 2, translated by William Whiston [Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1960], p. 582.)

This direct historical account shows the fulfillment of Jesus' statement about the destruction of Jerusalem.

Verses 12-14: And because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold. But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come.

In vv 10-11, Jesus has said that many will stumble, turn against each other, hate each other, and be led astray by false prophets. He now says that because of iniquity being multiplied, the love of "the many" shall wax cold. "The many" is literally, the majority. Jesus affirms that the majority of Christians will go into apostasy! The NASB and NIV (along with *Pulpit* Commentary and *Vincent's Word Studies*) say "most"! Realizing this makes us recall Lk. 18.8, where Jesus, speaking of the upcoming judgment on Jerusalem in the parable of the nagging widow, says:

> And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 I tell you that He will avenge them *speedily*. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He *really* find faith on the earth? (NKJV)

Thus Jesus wondered, if most Christians would fall away, if when he returned, he would even find faith in the land of Palestine!

This statement of Jesus about the preaching of the gospel is sometimes controversial, but whatever Jesus included in this prophecy is seen to be abundantly fulfilled in Ac. 2.5:

> Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven.

Also, in Rom. 1.8, Paul used similar language to speak of the faith of the Romans:

> First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world.

As he spoke specifically of the preaching of the gospel, Paul said in Col. 1.5, 6, 23: "...the truth of the gospel, which is come unto you; even as it is also in all the world, bearing fruit and increasing...continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye heard, which was preached in all creation under heaven..."

Paul wrote the Colossian letter in 62 A.D., a full eight years before the destruction of Jerusalem, in obvious fulfillment of the statement of Jesus in Mt. 24.14.

Verses 15-16: When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (Let him that readeth understand), then let them that are in Judea flee unto the mountains.

Here's the sign Jesus' disciples asked for—the abomination of desolation. This was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. Josephus says that when the Romans entered the city of Jerusalem, their pagan soldiers entered into the temple (which defiled it according to the Old Testament law) and hauled down the Jewish ornaments and temple accoutrements. Josephus (*Wars, VI*, 6, 1, p. 583.) relates how they raised in their place the pagan symbols and Roman standards. The abomination of desolation took place when the Romans placed their standards and pagan symbols in the holy place.

In Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse, since he's writing to a Gentile (Theophilus), he doesn't relate the Old Testament term "abomination of desolation," which wouldn't be familiar to his Gentile reader. Instead, he says, in Lk. 21.20-22:

> 20 But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand. 21 Then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains; and

> let them that are in the midst of her depart out; and let not them that are in the country enter therein. 22 For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

"Fleeing to the mountains" tells us that Jesus wasn't speaking of a planet-burning judgment at the end of time, as such flight wouldn't avail anything at such a time.

Verses 17-20: Let him that is on the housetop not go down to take out the things that are in his house: and let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak. But woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on a sabbath.

Jesus continued his warnings to flee the physical destruction, and this would have no application to a final return of Christ. Christians were to watch for these signs so they would know when to "flee to the mountains." They were to pray that they wouldn't have to flee on the sabbath or in the winter. Winter's extremes would hinder their flight, as also would a sabbath day, because of the locked gates of all the walled cities in Judea on the sabbath (See Neh. 13.19 for an example).

Verses 21-22: For then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

We also find historic testimony of the fulfillment of this prophecy in Josephus, who was present at the time, and who uses nearly the exact words of Jesus:

> Accordingly it appears to me, that the misfortunes of all men, from the beginning of the world, if they be compared to these of the Jews, are not so considerable as they were...(Josephus, *Wars*, Preface, 4, p. 428.)

Further, Josephus said that during the siege's grip, when no grain was left, wholesale destruction took place within the walls of Jerusalem. Food was so short that any locked door meant someone had food inside. Marauders would break down the doors, rush in, and grab the throats of those inside, hoping to squeeze a morsel of food from their

throats. Whole families perished during the siege. Tomb robbing was rampant. Josephus mentioned he saw 600,000 bodies thrown out the gates of the city. The Romans caught one deserter with gold he swallowed to smuggle out of the city. They suspected that many Jews attempted this. In one night the Romans killed 2000 Jews and ripped open their stomachs. Josephus told of one mother who was so hungry she roasted her infant son and ate half of him, and offered the other half to her neighbor.

In short, nothing in history matches the violence, savageness, famine, pestilence, and despair present in the siege of Jerusalem. It was the blackest and cruelest war in the annals of humanity, yet for those who were watchful, a way of escape existed. The Roman general Vespasian, who began the siege of Jerusalem, heard of the political tumult in Rome and returned to Rome to become the new emperor. He then sent his son, Titus, back to Jerusalem to finish the siege. During the lull in the siege, Christians alert to the warnings of Christ fled the city. Truly, as Jesus said, except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved; but for the elect's sake those days were shortened.

Verses 23-26: Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is the Christ, or, Here; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you before hand. If therefore they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the wilderness; go not forth: Behold, he is in the inner chambers; believe it not.

These are repetitions of earlier warnings against false Christs. See the reference to verse 11 for the historical fulfillment of these statements during the siege of Jerusalem.

Verses 27-28: For as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of man. Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

Taken by itself, some might use this verse to refer to a final return of Christ. Since the apostles did not ask him about it and the entire context speaks of the physical judgment Christ would bring upon the city of Jerusalem, "coming" refers to his presence in the form of the

Roman army. The Jewish nation was the carcass, which Christ sent the Roman eagles to devour.

"As lightning cometh" is quickly, visibly, and it's unstoppable. Christ's coming in the presence of the Roman vultures would occur in the same way.

Verse 29: But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.

Let's consider just one star falling from heaven to earth. Our sun, which is a rather mediocre star, will hold the equivalent of 1.3 million earths. There are other stars which dwarf our own sun. Now, just imagine one such star falling to earth—the entire planet would be completely destroyed. There would be nothing left for other stars to fall from heaven. This language was never intended to be taken literally.

Many times when we read this verse, someone says, "Surely the world has never seen anything like this," to which we answer, "Certainly we have!" In many cases in the Bible, speakers of inspiration have used these same phrases to describe a physical judgment God would bring against a city or nation.

For example, in Isa. 13.10, God said of Babylon:

> For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in its going forth, and the moon shall not cause its light to shine.

Has this prophecy of punishment been fulfilled against Babylon? It has, for that nation no longer even exists. This example illustrates God's use of "judgment language" to describe Babylon's dark day. In the same chapter, in verse 13, God said:

> Therefore I will make the heavens to tremble, and the earth shall be shaken out of its place, in the wrath of Jehovah of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.

In verses 19-20, he said:

> And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, shall be as when God overthrew

> Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch his tent there; neither shall shepherds make their flocks to lie down there.

In Babylon's case, the stars have ceased to give their light, the sun has been darkened, the moon is not causing its light to shine. The heavens have trembled, because God has carried out the judgment he spoke against them.

In Isa. 34.4, 5, God spoke of the destruction of Edom in similar language:

> And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll; and all their host shall fade away, as the leaf fadeth from off the vine, and as a fading leaf from the fig-tree. For my sword hath drunk its fill in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Edom, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment.

Has this statement been fulfilled? God carried out this judgment of Edom. It is no more!

A similar example of this type of language which has been fulfilled is Amos 8.9, where Amos prophesied the destruction of Samaria. See also Ezek. 32.7, 8, where Ezekiel foretold judgment against Egypt, and Jer. 4.23, 24, 27, 28, where Jeremiah revealed Judah's punishment at the hand of the Babylonians.

These passages illustrate the meaning of the same type of language Jesus used in Mt. 24.29. When some say, "Surely the world has never seen such," they simply are not aware of the way the Bible uses this type of language in reference to physical judgments which God carried out in the past, with no reference to a future end-of-time return of Christ at all.

Verses 30-31: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Before we consider the meaning of these words in detail, let us make this observation. Even if we did not understand their meaning, another consideration arises which would lead us to the conclusion that Christ fulfilled them in the destruction of Jerusalem. In verse 34, only seconds later, Jesus made the statement:

> Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished.

This is a most important consideration. If Jesus didn't fulfill all these prophecies during the generation to whom he was speaking, then Jesus himself was mistaken on the subject and doesn't deserve to be believed.

Some object that the word "generation" doesn't refer to the group of people who lived just at the time Jesus spoke these words. They suggest the idea that "race," "nation," or "Israel," replaces that of a contemporary generation. It is a belief without warrant. The word "generation" in the Bible doesn't mean "nation," "race," or "mankind," but always means a group of people who live contemporaneously.

To show this, Matthew used the word "generation" 10 other times in the book of Matthew (1.17, 3.7, 11.16, 12.39, 12.41, 42, 45, 16.4, 17.17, and 23.36). The word always referred to a group of people who lived at the same time. Notice especially the following:

Mt. 1.17:

> So all the *generations* from Abraham unto David are fourteen *generations*...

Mt. 11.16:

> But whereunto shall I liken this *generation?*...

Mt. 12.41:

> The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this *generation*...

Mt. 12.42:

> The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this *generation*...

Mt. 23.36:

> Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this *generation*.

In all these examples, as in all the rest, Jesus did not speak of anything other than what we mean when we use the term "generation." The term "generation," or "this generation" means *the same thing in Mt. 24.34* as it does in *every other occurrence in Matthew's gospel. This includes the word "generation" Jesus used earlier in this same conversation in Mt. 23.36 which has the same meaning as "generation" in Mt. 24.34.* All the things Jesus foretold would occur during the lifetime of his contemporaries. Thus, whether we or anyone else understand the teaching of verses 29-31, we can agree that whatever Jesus talked about, he fulfilled it in the generation he spoke to.

Now, in verse 30, when Jesus spoke about the appearance of the sign of the Son of man in heaven, he spoke about a *sign which would show that the Son of man was in heaven*. For instance, Jesus gave the apostles a similar sign in John 14. There he promised the apostles he would go back to heaven, and would send the Holy Spirit to guide them into all the truth. When the apostles received all the truth, it was a sign that Jesus was in heaven. Even though the apostles hadn't seen him sit down at the right hand of God, Peter stated in Ac. 2.33:

> Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear.

Peter argued that since the Holy Spirit had come as promised to the apostles, they knew Jesus had been exalted to the right hand of God. To further illustrate, suppose a local politician campaigned to you that if you elected him, he would see that your local water tower got painted bright orange. Suppose, further, that the next time you saw the water tower, it was bright orange. What do you know has happened even if you don't know the outcome of the election directly? You know the orange water tower is a sign of his election.

Similarly, when Jesus came in judgment on the city of Jerusalem, it was another sign that he was in heaven. Jesus told Caiaphas, the High Priest, and the Sanhedrin the same thing in Mt. 26.64, the night of the betrayal:

> ...Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.

Did they see this or not? Certainly they did, when Jesus sent the Roman armies to destroy the city of Jerusalem! At that time, they, being familiar with the judgment language of the Old Testament, would have to realize that it had come to pass just as Jesus warned it would.

We're Not as Familiar with the Language of the Old Testament as We Should Be

A major problem in interpreting Jesus' teaching in this chapter is that most of us are modern Western readers, whereas Jesus and the Jews he taught were Easterners who spoke in terms of the Old Testament. Robert Brinsmead discussed our problem in these terms:

> For various reasons we Christians have neglected or discarded the art of preaching Christ out of the Old Testament as the apostles did. Marcion, the great heretic of the second century, wanted to discard the Old Testament entirely. Although the church rejected Marcion, the Marcionian tendency has persisted. The church has not always been comfortable with the Old Testament. Christians often have not known what to do with it. And to the extent that we have neglected the God-given framework of the gospel, we have had to invent frameworks of our own. (Robert D. Brinsmead, *The Pattern of Redemptive History* [Falbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1979], p. 8.)

As a result of our shortcoming with the Old Testament, we are sorely tempted to interpret its use in the New Testament in an inappropriate way. Notice Paul Minear's comment relative to this:

> As one recalls Old Testament passages like these [e.g., Mt. 24.29, etc.—SGD], one is forced to conclude that every constituent essential feature in the New Testament prophecies was an echo of these. No Christian prophet tried to explain the meaning of these references to solar disasters, a fact that suggests that the audience was expected to understand the language.

> Modern readers, therefore, must compare this idiom not with modern views of the cosmos, but with an ancient outlook within which an intelligible message was conveyed without undue difficulty. (Paul Minear, *New Testament Apocalyptic* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1981], cited by Don K. Preston, *The Elements Shall Melt with Fervent Heat: A Study of II Peter 3* [Ardmore, OK: JaDon ProductionsLLC, 2006].)

On this same topic, R. T. France said:

> The unwary reader is in danger of assuming a note of finality in the future hope of the Old Testament that is in fact foreign to it. The "eschatology" of the Old Testament prophets was not concerned with the end of the world, but with the decisive act of God which will bring to an end the existing order of things in the world, and inaugurate a new era of blessing, of a totally different order."(R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982], cited *ibid.*)

A failure to interpret such language according to its Old Testament usage has always led to fanciful interpretations of contemporary earthquakes, wars, rumors of wars, famine, pestilence, etc., as indicative that "the end" is near in our time. For example, Martin Luther was subject to such speculation four centuries ago, as his statement shows:

> I am satisfied that the last day must be before the door; for the signs predicted by Christ and the Apostles Peter and Paul have now all been fulfilled, the trees put forth, the Scriptures are green and flourishing...We certainly have nothing now to wait for but the end of all things. (Martin Luther, cited by Don K. Preston, *The Last Days Identified* [Ardmore, OK: JaDon ProductionsLLC, 2004], p. 79.)

The passing of four centuries without realization of his expectations shows the weakness of Luther's analysis of these passages. Long before (and after) Luther, others were misinterpreting in the same fashion. Listen to a scholar named Ephraem:

> We ought to understand thoroughly therefore, my brothers what is imminent or overhanging. Already there have been hunger and plagues, violent movements of nations and signs, which have already been fulfilled, and there is no other which remains, except the advent of the wicked one in the completion of the Roman kingdom. Brothers, the end of the world is at hand, believe me because it is the very last time. (cited by Don K. Preston, *ibid.*)

We have to admit that Ephraem sounds like Martin Luther, who in turn sounds like the Hal Lindseys of our time, don't we? However, Ephraem wrote in the fourth century! Such prophetic speculation has been going on for a long time.

The Significance of Coming on the Clouds of Heaven

Some may object that Jesus never came on the clouds of heaven, and that this language can apply only to a final return. Yet, the Bible speaks many times of divine beings "coming on the clouds of heaven," in passages which speak of unusual events that have already occurred. To be specific, at the time Jesus used these words, God's people had heard this language used only about national judgments.

For example, in Isa. 19.1-4, Isaiah said of the forthcoming destruction of Egypt:

> Behold, Jehovah rideth upon a swift cloud, and cometh unto Egypt...And the spirit of Egypt shall fall in the midst of it; and I will destroy the counsel thereof;...And I will give over the Egyptians into the hand of a cruel lord; and a fierce king shall rule over them, saith the Lord, Jehovah of hosts.

This language is similar to what Jesus used of his coming on the clouds. It was fulfilled by the captivity of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar in the sixth century B.C.

Similarly, in Jer. 4.13, God used the same type of language to threaten Judah with invasion:

> Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots shall be as the whirlwind: His horses are swifter than eagles.

In this way, God spoke of his coming on the clouds in the form of the Babylonian army. The Babylonians fulfilled this passage when they captured Judah and took the Jews away into captivity.

Thus, Jesus' language in Mt. 24.29, 30 is used other times in the Bible to speak of a purely physical judgment brought upon a city or nation. When we consider that Jesus said, "*This generation shall not pass away* till all these things be accomplished," surely Jesus spoke of the destruction which took place about forty years after he uttered this prophecy.

Verse 31: And he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

First, we need to realize that the word "angel," which simply means "messenger," may refer to human messengers. It is so used of John the Baptist in Mt. 11.10, the messengers of John the Baptist, in Lk. 7.24, the apostles of Christ, Lk. 9.52, and the Jewish spies in Jas. 2.25.

The "gathering" of Jews who had been scattered through their various captivities is a major prophetic theme in the Old Covenant. It was forseen in Dt. 30.1-5 to take place in Old Covenant Israel's last days. This gathering of the elect was foretold in Isa. 11.12 (quoted as fulfilled in the first century by Paul in Rom. 15.12), 27.12-13, 43.5-7, 56.6-8 as well as other Old Testament prophets.

We understand the significance of "the four winds of heaven" when we consider Lk. 13.29, where Jesus said of his kingdom:

> And they shall come from the east and west, and from the north and south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.

The significance of "trumpets" is that they were always instruments of warning or deliverance. Thus, Jesus may well have spoken of the declaration of the gospel by his apostles. The apostles warned their perverse generation of Jews of the judgment to come upon them because of their rejection of the Messiah. This is exactly the thought of verse Mt. 24.14:

> And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come.

Verses 32-34: Now from the fig tree learn her parable: when her branch is now become tender, and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that summer is nigh; even so ye also, when ye see all these things, know ye that he is nigh, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished.

We have already commented on the "This generation shall not pass away" statement. Here Jesus exhorted the apostles that he had given them signs whereby they could know that the physical judgment he spoke of, the destruction of Jerusalem, was nigh. Then they could flee to the mountains (v16).

Our dispensational friends assume this fig tree represents the restoration of Israel in May 1948, and Jesus used it only to illustrate how people of his own generation should be watchful to escape the destruction coming upon Jerusalem. However, such an assumption flies in the face of Jesus' statements about the fig tree in Mk. 11.13, 20:

> And seeing a fig tree by the way side, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only; and he saith unto it, Let there be no fruit from thee henceforward for ever. And immediately the fig tree withered away.

If this were talking about Israel, this hardly sounds like a restoration, but rather a curse or a withering away. However, it gets worse in verse 20:

> And as they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away from the roots.

In Luke's account (Lk. 21.29-32), Jesus said:

> And he spake to them a parable: Behold the fig tree, *and all the trees* [emphasis mine—SGD]: when they now shoot forth, ye see it and know of your own selves that the summer is now nigh. Even so ye also, when ye see these things coming to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all things be accomplished.

If dispensationalists are free to assume that the fig tree represents the modern political state of Israel, we wonder what *all the other trees* might represent! Again, even if we grant the pure assumption that the fig tree represents the modern state of Israel, it hardly sounds like a prosperous restoration! Actually, we learn the same lesson from all the trees—when they're shooting forth in the spring, we know that summer and the season of harvest is nigh. So with Old Covenant—they're about to be harvested, as per Malachi, John the Baptist, and Jesus.

Before leaving verse 34, we want to comment further on Jesus' statement that "This generation shall not pass away, till all things be accomplished." Our dispensational friends not only fiddle with the meaning of the word "generation," suggesting it might mean something other than the way it's used in the gospels, but they also argue with the meaning of the word "this." They claim it wasn't Jesus' generation, but one much later, even two thousand years later, in our time. They also insist "all" doesn't mean "all," since they don't believe that "all" of what Jesus talked about was fulfilled in his generation. Likewise, they assert "these things" might mean "some of these things," as they don't believe the judgment pronounced upon Israel occurred in his generation. In fact, there's an apparent willingness to fiddle with every word in the clause so that it means *anything but what Jesus said!*

Verses 35-36: Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only.

The language, "heaven and earth shall pass away," causes some to think that Jesus here began to speak of a final end-of-time return. However, Jesus taught on this subject earlier in Mt. 5.17-18, where he said:

> For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished.

Does this statement not teach that none of the law and the prophets would pass away before heaven and earth passed away? Yet we all believe that the Mosaic Law has passed away. All futurist eschatologies (premillennial, postmillennial, and amillennial) believe at least some of the Mosaic Law has passed away. If we believe that any of the Mosaic Law has passed away, mustn't we then believe that

heaven and earth have passed away? Let's examine that conclusion more closely.

If heaven and earth have passed away, this phrase cannot mean that the planet earth and the stars have passed away, because we still see them almost daily!

However, there is another sense in which heaven and earth is used. Remember that the Bible is essentially of oriental or Hebrew origin. As such, the Hebrew language contained idioms that cannot be interpreted correctly from a western or Greek point of view. The expression "heavens and earth" is such an idiom. To see how it's used idiomatically, let's notice Isa. 51.16. In this chapter, God rehearses with Israel the history of his dealings with them, beginning with Abraham. He reviews his bringing them out of Egyptian captivity through the Red Sea. In verse 16, he reviews his bringing them to Sinai and giving them his covenant there:

> And I have put My words in your mouth, and have covered you with the shadow of My hand, to establish the heavens, to found the earth, and to say to Zion, You are My people.

When God gave Israel his covenant, the Mosaic Law, he says that he created the heavens and the earth. Of course, he didn't create a new planet earth with new sun, moon, and stars at Sinai, but he did create a new world order, a new covenant people, law, and land.The term heavens and earth is often used in this way. In II Peter 3, Peter uses this term to speak of the heavens and earth of Noah's day, when the corrupt order was destroyed by the flood. The planet and stars weren't destroyed, but the pre-flood world order certainly was.

Later in the chapter, Peter speaks of the passing away of the corrupt Mosaic heavens and earth (the same order spoken of in Isa. 51) and the coming of a new order under he Messiah, a new heavens and earth. Peter uses the term "heavens and earth" to talk about three world orders: the pre-flood order, the Mosaic order, and the Messiah's new order after the passing of Old Covenant Israel. It is impossible that any of these usages refers to a literal planet and stars, as we in the Messiah's age live on exactly the same planet and under exactly the same stars as did Adam and Eve, and, Old Covenant Israel!

We'll discuss this concept more fully in the chapter on II Peter 3: "Destruction of the Universe or Destruction of Jerusalem?" For the present, we summarize our comments on this expression thusly. When

Peter said the heavens would pass away, he used language common in the Old Testament to speak of the overthrow of political powers. In Isa. 14.12f, the fall of the ruler of Babylon was spoken of as a falling star. In Isa. 13.10, 13, 19, Isaiah used such language to describe the fall of Babylon; in Isa. 34.4, the fall of Edom. In Isa. 51.6, the nation of Israel would so fall. In Joel 3.16, the fall of Jerusalem after the Messiah was foretold in such words. Peter said it would be so with the destruction of Jerusalem. Peter had said the same thing in Ac. 2.19ff, when he quoted Joel 2.28-32 in the first gospel sermon. Haggai used the same language in Hag. 2.6, *quoted in Heb. 12.26-28 to speak of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem.* Jesus used the same language in Mt. 24.39-42 and Lk. 21.26, 11.

In conclusion, when Jesus says that heaven and earth will pass away, the Mosaic order certainly would, but here is some truth that will always stand: The city of Jerusalem is going to be destroyed! Taking these verses in their proper context, the subject matter here was still the destruction of Jerusalem rather than a final end-of-time return of Christ.

Some say Jesus spoke of two events in this chapter because he said the time of one event (the destruction of Jerusalem) was given (i.e., in this generation), but the time of the second event (a final end-of-time return of Christ) was not given. Note carefully that Jesus did *not* say the time of one event could be known in advance and the time of the other could not be known in advance. Jesus said the judgment would occur in "this generation," but "of that day and hour knoweth no one." I expect to die *in this generation*, but I know not *the day and the hour*. Does that imply that my death will take place at two different times? I expect my hair to turn completely gray *in this generation*, but I don't know *the day and hour* it will happen. Does that imply it will completely turn gray twice? Neither does Jesus' language imply that he spoke of two events to be fulfilled at two different times.

An Argument Which Shows No Transition Occurs in Matthew 24

At this point we want to show that, from a consideration of Jesus' answer, no transition from one subject to another occurred in Matthew 24. As mentioned earlier, verse 29 is a popular choice for a transition point from the destruction of Jerusalem to a final end-of-time return. Verse 36 is another popular choice. Consider carefully that the lan-

guage of Jesus' answer implied no transition at either verse 29 or verse 36.

In Lk. 17.22-37, Jesus used much the same language as in Matthew 24 in a similar discourse several days before the Matthew 24 discourse. This took place as Jesus and the apostles traveled to Jerusalem for the final week of his life. Notice that several times Jesus interweaves language generally taken to be about a final end-of-time return in Matthew 24 with language taken to be about the destruction of Jerusalem in Matthew 24. For example, in Lk. 17.26, 27, Jesus said:

> And as it came to pass in the days of Noah, even so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank,...

This language is identical to Mt. 24.37ff, generally taken to be about a final end-of-time return. It is also *after* the supposed transition in earlier verses.

However, in Lk. 17.31, (the next verse), Jesus said:

> *In that day*, he that shall be on the housetop, and his goods in the house, let him not go down to take them away...

This is language identical to Mt. 24.17ff, which is generally applied to the destruction of Jerusalem, and occurs *before* the supposed transition in Matthew 24. In other words, Jesus' reversal of these matters without regard to the supposed transition of Matthew 24 shows no transition took place. Further, no transition occurs between verses 30-31 in Luke 17. When Jesus said, "in that day" in Lk. 17.31, he must have referred to the day when the Son of man was revealed in verse 30.

Also, we find another comparable example in Luke 17. In verses 35-36, Jesus spoke of "two women grinding together; the one shall be taken and the other shall be left." This is the same type of language as in Mt. 24.41, *after* the supposed transition. In the next verse of Luke 17 we find: "And they *answering* say unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Where the body is, thither will the eagles also be gathered together." Again, this is the same language of Mt. 24.28, generally regarded as fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem because it occurs *before* the supposed transition.

In addition, no transition occurs between Lk. 17.36-37 because, in verse 37, the disciples referred to the things Jesus had just said in verse

35: "And they answering say unto him, Where, Lord?" Jesus' language simply will not allow for a transition as supposed in Mt. 24.29 or 36.

If Jesus' language implied a change of subject in Matthew 24, then the same language would have Jesus, in Luke 17, jumping back and forth between these two major Bible subjects as follows:

Did Jesus Make All These Transitions in Luke 17?

vv23-25:	Destruction of Jerusalem
vv26-30:	End-of-time return
vv31-33:	Destruction of Jerusalem
vv34-36:	End-of-time return
vs37:	Destruction of Jerusalem

Who do we know that teaches or interprets passages in this fashion other than Jehovah's Witnesses? Who can believe that Jesus hopped back and forth from verse to verse to talk about two of the major events of all Bible times? Where else does he do it in all the gospels?

Several years ago, *Reader's Digest* related an incident that occurred when the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) tested the comprehension of the astronauts in a distinctive speed-reading program. NASA composed a special text with every other sentence taken from two entirely different sources about two entirely different subjects. They gave this material to two different groups of astronauts, one which had completed the speed-reading course and one which had not. They were told to read the material as fast as possible and then they would be given a test to determine their level of comprehension.

When the race began, the astronauts who had completed the speed-reading course flashed through the material very rapidly, with no notice that the material dealt with two entirely different subjects line-by-line. The other group read just a few lines, stopped, and exclaimed, "This is nonsense material!" They realized people don't discuss two important subjects simultaneously and switch subjects with every other sentence.

Neither did Jesus in Matthew 24. His language in neither Luke 17 nor Matthew 24 demands that he spoke about an end-of-time return. More than that, it means that Jesus did not make such a transition.

The Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants

Verses 37-51:"And as were the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man. 38 For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, 39 and they knew not until the flood came, and *took* them all away; so shall be the coming of the Son of man. 40 Then shall two man be in the field; one is *taken*, and one is left: 41 two women shall be grinding at the mill; one is *taken*, and one is left. 42 Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh. 43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken through. 44 Therefore be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh. 45 Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath set over his household, to give them their food in due season? 46 Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. 47 Verily I say unto you, that he will set him over all that he hath. 48 But if that *evil servant* shall say in his heart, My lord *tarrieth*; 49 and shall begin to beat his fellow-servants, and shall eat and drink with the drunken; 50 the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he expecteth not, and in an hour when he knoweth not, 51 and shall cut him asunder, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth."

In these verses, Jesus gave some exhortations to watchfulness. Hhe warned the apostles that, during the physical judgment that came upon Noah's generation, most of the people were not watchful, therefore they perished. So, the ones to whom Jesus spoke were to be watchful so that they could escape and not be consumed in the tragedy which was to befall Jerusalem.

Note in particular that in v48, that Jesus characterizes as *evil* the servant who said his lord tarried. In v51, Jesus says that servant is a hypocrite. What do you think of a servant of Christ who doesn't think Jesus returned in his generation as he promised, but tarried when he said in no uncertain terms that he would not in Heb. 10.37:

> For yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come,
> and shall not tarry.

Jesus rightly calls such an evil servant a hypocrite, i.e., a play-actor, because he acts like a Christian who trusts in the teaching of Christ, yet he denies Jesus' guarantee he wouldn't tarry. If Jesus

thought the servants who scoffed at his not coming in II Pet. 3 was evil, what in the world do you think he thinks of people claiming to be servants of his in the 21st century who think he still hasn't returned when he promised to in his own generation?

In vv39, Jesus speaks of the wicked being taken away in the flood. Then in vv40-41, where he speaks of one person being taken and another left, our dispensational friends see evidence of their "rapture" doctrine, where they assert that at Jesus' coming, he would come back to earth to take his saints off the earth and rescue them from the great tribulation coming. After all, some are "taken" and others are left. In their view, the ones taken are the righteous. However, they've got it just backwards. In Jesus' view, the wicked are the ones that are taken, not the righteous who are left behind. The dispensational authors of the *Left Behind* books and movies should take note! They should also note that Jesus prayed the night before he died, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them from the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one" (Jn. 17.15). Did not Jesus get the word on the rapture?

The Judgment Jesus Spoke of in Matthew 24 Is an Escapable Judgment

Jesus spoke of an escapable judgment in Matthew 24, not an inescapable end-of-time judgment. Notice Jesus' conclusion in each of the gospel accounts:Jesus' Conclusion in Mark

> Watch therefore: for ye know not when the Lord of the house cometh, whether at midnight or at cockcrowing or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch. (13.35-37)

Jesus' Conclusion in Matthew

> Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have suffered his house to be broken through. Therefore be ye also ready, for in an hour that yet think not the Son of man cometh. (24.42-44)

Jesus' Conclusion in Luke

> But watch ye at every season, making supplication, *that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass,* and to stand before the Son of man. (21.36)

Notice in Mark's and Matthew's accounts, they both gave the same exhortations to watchfulness. Yet, Luke added something in his account which is nowhere present in the other accounts: "But watch ye at every season, making supplication, *that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass,* and to stand before the Son of man."

From these words, Jesus obviously spoke not of an earth-burning end-of-time judgment, from which no man would escape, but the destruction of Jerusalem, from which he desired that the faithful escape. The judgment Jesus spoke about in this chapter was an escapable judgment that was to take place in the lifetime of the generation he spoke to.

Recall now Jesus' words in Mt. 24.15-16:

> When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation...then let them that are in Judea flee unto the mountains...

Why did he give these signs that were to precede his coming on the clouds? "...that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass."

History Records This Happened

As we've seen, the purpose of Jesus' words in this chapter was to warn faithful people who would see the signs of the approaching physical judgment and escape it. Eusebius, a third century historian, wrote of the early Jerusalem church:

> The whole body, however, of the church at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation given to men of approved piety there before the war removed from the city and dwelt at a certain town beyond the Jordan, called Pella. (Pamphilus Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, translated by C. F. Cruse

> [Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Company, 1869], lib. 3, chapter 6.)

Historian George P. Holford wrote:

> After the destruction of Jerusalem seventeen hundred Jews who surrendered at Macherus were slain, and of fugitives not less than three thousand in the wood of Jardes. Titus having marched his army to Caesarea, he (Titus) there, with great splendor, celebrated the birth-day of his brother Domitian; and according to the barbarous manner of those times, punished many Jews in honor of it. The number who was burnt, and who fell by fighting with wild beasts, and in mutual combats, exceeded two thousand five hundred." George P. Holford, *The Destruction of Jerusalem*, 1805, cited by William Robert West, *The Resurrection and Immorality*. Third Edition, available at robertwr.com, p. 223)

The British Methodist commentator Adam Clarke lists some that were killed at other places.

> By the inhabitants of Caesarea, above 20,000. At Scythopolis, above 13,000. At Ascalon, 2,500. At Ptolemais, 2,000. At Alexandria, 50,000. At Joppa, when taken by Cestius Gallus, 8,400. In a mountain called Asamon, near Sepporis, above 2,000. At Damascus, 10,000. In a battle with the Romans at Ascalon, 10,000. In an ambuscade near the same place, 8,000. At Japha, 15,000. Of the Samaritans, on Mount Gerizim, 11,600. At Jotapa, 40,000. At Joppa, when taken by Vespasian, 4,200. At Tarichea, 6,500. And after the city was taken, 1,200. At Gamala, 4,000, besides 5,000 who threw themselves down a precipice. Of those who fled with John, of Gischala, 6,000. Of the Gadarenes, 15,000 slain, besides countless multitudes drowned. In the village of Idumea, above 10,000 slain. At Gerasa, 1,000. At Machaerus, 1,700. In the wood of Jardes, 3,000. In the castle of Masada, 960. In Cyrene, by Catullus the governor, 3,000. Besides these, many of every age, sex, and condition, were slain

> in the war, who are not reckoned; but, of those who are reckoned, the number amounts to upwards of 1,357,660, which would have appeared incredible, if their own historian had not so particularly enumerated them." (*Commentary on Matthew*, cited by Robert West, *Ibid.*, p. 224.)

So, in a siege of Jerusalem where 1,100,000 Jews perished and another two and one half million were taken into slavery, not one faithful individual who heeded the warnings of Jesus given in this chapter perished. Christians fled as Jesus had commanded them to do.

Two Final Points on the Words "End" and "Coming"

We have already noticed the words "end" and "coming" in our analysis of the questions the apostles asked Jesus, which provoked the teaching of Matthew 24. In conclusion, we want to notice two interesting facts about the use of these words. If "end" refers to an end-of-time return of Christ, and a transition or change of subjects occurs somewhere in the chapter, we would expect Jesus' use of "end" to be in the *latter* part of the chapter. This is *exactly the opposite* of how Jesus used it:

vs 6: "...for these things must needs come to pass, but *the end* is not yet."

vs 13: "But he that endureth to *the end*, the same shall be saved."

vs 14: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world,...and then shall *the end* come."

As we have already noticed, these occurrences of "the end" are all *before* verse 34, where Jesus said, "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished." Hence, the end spoken of is not the end of the planet, but the end or consummation of the Mosaic age.

Likewise, when we notice the use of the word "coming" in this chapter (if Jesus used it of a final end-of-time return), we would find its use in the *latter* part of the chapter; yet, it occurs *throughout* the chapter without regard to any supposed transition in verses 29 or 36. Thus, Jesus spoke of his "coming" both *before and after* any supposed transition.

Summary on Matthew 24

In conclusion, let's briefly summarize the major points of this study. According to the material we've presented here, Jesus did not speak of a final return in Matthew 24 for the following reasons:

The apostles did not ask Jesus about an end-of-time return from heaven.

The language of their questions didn't permit it.

They wouldn't have asked about an end-of-time return because they admittedly didn't expect Jesus to leave.

Jesus' answer didn't permit that he spoke of anything other than a physical judgment against the city of Jerusalem.

The judgment of which Jesus spoke was an escapable judgment.

We now notice Jesus' next parable, given to exhort his disciples to watchfulness for his coming and the end of the age. In all these parables, it's important to notice that the bridegroom or the master of the house who goes away, returns to the same servants that he left, not their descendants twenty generations later. Likewise, Jesus' coming and judgment was going to be in his generation, not people in our time.
The Parable of the Ten Virgins

25:1 "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. 2 And five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3 For the foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them: 4 but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. 5 Now while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. 6 But at midnight there is a cry, Behold, the bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet him. 7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out. 9 But the wise answered, saying, Peradventure there will not be enough for us and you: go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. 10 And while they went away to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that *were ready* went in with

him to the marriage feast: and the door was shut. 11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. 12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. 13 *Watch* therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour."

This parable turns on those servants were ready for their master's return vs. the ones that weren't prepared. Of course, they didn't know the day nor the hour of his coming, but they did know the generation, didn't they?

The Parable of the Talents

"14 For it is as when a man, going into another country, called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. 15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his several ability; and he went on his journey. 16 Straightway he that received the five talents went and traded with them, and made other five talents. 17 In like manner he also that received the two gained other two. 18 But he that received the one went away and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. 19 Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them. 20 And he that received the five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: lo, I have gained other five talents. 21 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. 22 And he also that received the two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: lo, I have gained other two talents. 23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. 24 And he also that had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou didst not scatter; 25 and I was afraid, and went away and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, thou hast thine own. 26 But his lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I did not scatter; 27 thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back mine own with interest. 28 Take ye away therefore the talent from him, and

give it unto him that hath the ten talents. 29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away. 30 And cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth."

Again, this parable turns on the servants that were ready and prepared for their master's return vs. those who were not.

What About The Judgment of Matthew 25?

The question arises, if Matthew 24 does not speak of a final end-of-time coming of Christ, what about Matthew 25? If the apostles didn't ask Jesus about such a coming and he didn't teach about it, what about the judgment scene described in Mt. 25.31-46?

For years after I reached my present understanding about Matthew 24, I was asked this question, and I fielded it this way: Jesus concluded his Matthew 24 discourse with three parables: (1) The Faithful and Unfaithful Servants (Mt. 24.45-51), (2) The Ten Virgins (Mt. 25.1-13), and (3) The Talents (Mt. 25.14-30). The main point of two of these parables turned on "watchfulness," whether for the judgment on Jerusalem, or any other judgment, even a final judgment of all men. Thus, Jesus concluded Matthew 24 with these three parables, which illustrated his exhortations to watchfulness. I then reasoned that, if Jesus spoke of his final judgment in Mt. 25.31ff, then it was during those three parables that he made a transition to his teaching about a final judgment. It would be as though while he spoke on watchfulness that he said, "Here is another judgment you need to be watchful for." Then he gave instruction about an end-of-time final judgment, even though the apostles didn't ask him about it.

I also made a distinction at Mt. 25.31, where Jesus spoke of his coming in glory, and contrasted that with his coming in judgment in Matthew 24. I now realize that the judgment in Matthew 24 was also a coming in glory. First, notice in Mt. 16.27-28, Jesus spoke of a coming in glory in his generation:

> For the Son of man shall come in the *glory* of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds. Verily I say unto you, *There are some of them that stand here, who shall in*

> *no wise taste of death*, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

Thus, Jesus spoke of a coming in glory, where every man will be judged according to his deeds, and these events would take place because of the Christ's rule. His rule was to commence during the lifetime of those who heard him.

Likewise, notice also in Lk. 9.26-27, where Jesus foretold a coming in glory in that generation:

> For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in his own glory, and the glory of the Father, and of the holy angels. But I tell you of a truth, There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.

These passages teach the same thing as Matthew 24. The destruction of Jerusalem was also a coming in glory. Hear him in Mt. 24.30:

> ...and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

As Jesus taught in Mt. 24.34, his coming in glory was to occur in that generation. Thus, the coming in glory in Mt. 25.32 is not a new subject. Jesus had long prophesied a like coming during the lifetime of his listeners.

One last introductory observation on the judgment of Matthew 25: Recall in our introduction to this essay that we noticed Jesus' pronouncements in Matthew 12 and 23 on his generation in his generation:

> The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this *generation*...

Mt. 12.42:

> The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this *generation*...

Mt. 23.36:

> Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this *generation*.

After Jesus teaching on the time and sign of fulfillment of "all these things" in Matthew 24, then he comes back to the subject of the judgment again in Matthew 25, with Matthew 24 nestled between his teaching on the judgment in Matthew 23 and 25. Isn't it more reasonable to take Matthew 25 as part of the same context as Matthew 24-25? It was given in the same conversation, with the same listeners, and on the same subject, rather than an entirely different judgment more than 2000 years later!

As a matter of fact, consider the time statements in Mt. 25.31:

> But *when* the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, *then* shall he sit on the throne of his glory:

Consider the time terms "when" and "then." As we've just seen, the last times Jesus spoke of his coming in glory, he said that it would be in his generation (Mt. 24.30, 34), and during the lifetime of some of his disciples (Mt. 16.27-28). His coming in glory is at the same time in Mt. 25.31. He then says, "then" shall he sit on the throne of his glory, as we see, for the judgment of Matthew 25. The "then" of the judgment is at the same time of his coming in glory, i.e., during his generation and during the lifetime of some of his disciples.

The Old Testament Background of Matthew 25 in Joel 2-3

In Joel 2.1-17, God used Joel to warn Israel of its upcoming destruction at the hands of the Assyrians. However, after they'd gone into captivity and repented, in vv18-27, God promised he would again show mercy to them, and restore them. In vv28-32, Joel uttered these familiar words:

> And it will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions. And even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in

> those days. And I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth Blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD Will be delivered; For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem *There will be those who escape*, As the LORD has said, Even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

Of course, they're familiar since Peter quoted them only weeks after the resurrection of Christ in Ac. 2.15-21 and said, "this is that" which Joel talked about, speaking of his own time.

Many will instantly recognize that Joel spoke of another destruction coming upon Israel in the Christian age, using the same language Jesus used of Jerusalem's destruction in the Olivet Discourse. When Peter affirmed, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel," he applied Joel's teaching to the imminent judgment of Israel in his day, the one Jesus said was coming "in this generation."

Beginning in Joel 3.1-2 Joel foretold what would happen after Israel's restoration in the time of Jesus and Peter:

> For behold, in those days and at that time, When I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations, And bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. Then I will enter into judgment with them there On behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel.

Now notice what Joel further said about the judgment of "all the nations" in vv11-13:

> Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations, And gather yourselves there. Bring down, O LORD, Thy mighty ones. Let the nations be aroused And come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, For there I will sit to judge All the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full; The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great.

Observe that Joel spoke of God judging all the surrounding nations "in those days and at that time," the time Peter spoke of as the last days

when he said, "This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel." What were these nations? All the nations on the planet, as we popularly take it? Not at all, for if we keep reading in Joel 3, he identified the nations: Tyre, Sidon, and the regions of Philistia. In other words, the nations or tribes of Judea, precisely the nations or tribes spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 24 (and identified by Josephus as the nation of the Samaritans), the nation of the Galileans, and the nations of Idumea, Perea, Trachonitis, Iturea, and Abilene.

Notice also that this judgment would take place at the harvest, which in Mt. 13.39, Jesus said was the end of the age, the Mosaic age. John also spoke of "putting in the sickle" in the harvest of the great city (Babylon, Rev. 18.10, which is where the Lord was crucified, Rev. 11.8) in Rev. 14.15:

> And another angel came out from the temple, crying with a great voice to him that sat on the cloud, Send forth thy sickle, and reap: for the hour to reap is come; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.

Of course, John said the things of which he wrote were at hand, shortly to come to pass, which Jesus would accomplish as he was to come quickly. (Rev. 1.1, 3, 22.12),

So Joel foretold the judgment of Israel in Matthew 25, used the language Jesus used in Matthew 24 to speak of the same judgment of Israel in his own generation, and which Peter identified as the very thing Joel was talking about in his own generation.

One last thing to notice from Joel 2.32:

> And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD Will be delivered; For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem *There will be those who escape*, As the LORD has said, Even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

Joel said the faithful would escape the destruction of Jerusalem. Likewise, Jesus urged his followers to escape the same destruction in Mt. 24.15-20:

> When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand), then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the

> mountains: let him that is on the housetop not go down to take out things that are in his house: and let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak. But woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on a sabbath:

In addition, we've seen in Lk. 21.36 that Jesus said:

> But watch ye at every season, making supplication, *That ye may prevail to escape* all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

Thus, (1) Joel foretold a time when God would judge the nations around Israel, yet the faithful would be able to escape. (2) Jesus prophesied the same thing for his generation. (3) Peter said the judgment coming on Israel was what Joel foretold for the last days, the last days of Old Covenant Israel. Only by ignoring the prophetic background of Matthew 25 would we apply the judgment scene there to anything other than the judgment that took place at the destruction of Jerusalem.

With these comments in mind, let's look at Mt. 25.31-46:

Verse 31-32: But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him; then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats.

As we have already noticed, Mt. 16.27-28 spoke of a like judgment in that generation. This judgment would "render unto every man according to his deeds." Surely, he didn't speak of men in America (in that generation), but men in that generation of Jews.

"But," someone says, "Mt. 25.32 says 'nations.' How can a judgment which involves nations speak of just a national judgment on Israel?" This is a notable objection until we realize that the land of Israel comprised many nations. We normally think of Israel of Jesus' time as one nation, but not so. For example, the Jewish historian Josephus referred to the nation of the Samaritans, the nation of the Galileans, and the nations of Idumea, Perea, Trachonitis, Iturea, and Abilene. Judea was spoken of as a distinct nation, with a king of its own. The Greek term *ethnarch* (literally, "ruler of a nation") described the rulers of these nations.

This agrees with Jesus' own usage in Mt. 24.7, where he said:

> For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom...

Jesus spoke of many nations in that region, with Jews in all, which would be affected by the Roman invasion of the land. In Lk. 21.25-32, Luke quoted Jesus:

> And there shall be signs in sun and moon and stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the billows...This generation shall not pass away, till all things be accomplished.

Accordingly, "all the nations" speaks of the nations of Palestine. As we've seen, these are the very nations in Matthew 24.

Verse 33: ...and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

Again, this agrees with Mt. 16.27-28, which says he would "render to every man according to his deeds...some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death."

Verses 34-40: Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee? or athirst, and gave thee drink? And when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? And when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me.

Notice what the destiny of the righteous and wicked hangs on in this judgment. On faith in Christ? No. On whether they've been baptized? No. On benevolence toward Christians? Not at all. On whether they observed the Lord's Supper? He did not mention it. On whether they were faithful in church discipline? No. Assembling? No, nor on

personal evangelism, nor any of the other things Christians concern themselves about at a final judgment.

However, it sounds exactly like a judgment on the Jews of Jesus' time, many of whom weren't merciful or benevolent. For example, in Mt. 9.13 Jesus condemned many of the Jews for their emphasis on religious ritual rather than their treatment of their fellowman:

> But go ye and learn what this meaneth, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.

Likewise, in Mt. 23.23, 24, Jesus finally condemned them in a similar manner:

> Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith: but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone. Ye blind guides, that strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel!

Likewise, in Luke 10, Jesus showed in the parable of the Good Samaritan that the Samaritans (who were mixed Israelites and Assyrians, who the Jews regarded as dogs) knew more about how to treat their fellowman than did many of the Jews. Thus, for their lack of mercy, Jesus affirmed that they would not receive mercy, not at the final judgment, but in his destruction of Jerusalem.

Verse 41: Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels.

"Eternal fire" without doubt makes us think of the final judgment, but should it necessarily do so? Can this language apply to a national judgment? Many would insist not, but look carefully at Jude 7. In a context where Jude showed that God knows how to punish false teachers, he used the example of what God did to the unbelieving Jews he brought out of Egypt, sinful angels, and Sodom and Gomorrah. About these two cities, Jude wrote:

> Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, having in like manner with these given themselves over to fornication and gone after strange flesh,

> are set forth as an example, suffering the punishment of eternal fire.

This language is identical to that used by Jesus, "eternal fire," yet Jude used it of a national judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah. It is not a judgment that Sodom and Gomorrah will suffer in the future, but one they have already suffered. If they haven't yet suffered this judgment, they cannot be set forth as an example that God knows how to render judgment on the wicked.

Jesus used *eternal fire* the same way in Matthew 25. If so, this could be the same baptism of fire John the Baptist promised disobedient Jews in Mt. 3.10-12:

> And even now the axe lieth at the root of the trees: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor; and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire.

While many view "baptism in fire" as a blessing, Jesus' use of fire three times in this passage shows he didn't intend it so. "Fire" in Mt. 3.10 represented destruction and punishment, as it was in Mt. 3.12. It takes great violence to the context to make "fire" in verse 11 to be anything except destruction and punishment. The punishment John spoke about was as imminent as the axe at the root of the tree. He spoke of the imminent national judgment upon the nations of the region by the Romans in 70 A.D.

Verses 42-46: for I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not unto

one of these least, ye did it not unto me. And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life.

Thus, Jesus concluded with language similar to verse 41: national condemnation upon disobedient Jews for their shallow adherence to the Law of Moses.

The term "eternal" in this passage is literally "age-lasting," and has no inherent concept of endlessness. It is correctly translated as everlasting, forever, and eternal. In the Greek Old Testament, Jonah used *aionion* when he said in 2.6:

> I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me *forever*,

and yet forever in Jonah's case was three days and nights. In the case of the Aaronic priesthood (Ex. 28.43), the priestly trumpets (Num. 10.8), the feast of firstfruits (Lev. 23.4), and sabbath commandment (Ex. 31.16), all these element of the Mosaic law were to observed *aionion,* everlasting, eternal, or forever, yet we know that they only lasted throughout the Mosaic age.

Thus when we come to Mt. 25.41, 46, eternal or "age-lasting" fire in this Jewish judgment on those who rejected Christ was throughout the Mosaic age, while "age-lasting" life for the obedient was throughout the Messianic age, which, as we've seen has no end (Isa. 9.6, Lk. 1.33).

We conclude with a quotation from Franklin Camp on the significance of the destruction of Jerusalem:

> The fall of Jerusalem separated Judaism from Christianity. Judaism was a God-ordained religion. This made it possible for Judaizing teachers to deceive and confuse people as long as the temple existed. It was one thing to appeal to people to give up paganism with its religion as it was never approved by God. It was still another thing to call on the Jews to lay aside Judaism which was given by God and at one time acceptable to God. It is easy to see how Judaizing teachers used this in opposing the church. But when Jerusalem fell, the temple was destroyed, and they could no longer use this as a means of trying to confuse people. (Franklin Camp, *The Work of the Holy Spirit in Redemption* (Birmingham, AL: Roberts and Sons, 1974,

cited by Don K. Preston, *Like Father, Like Son, on Clouds of Glory* [Ardmore, OK: JaDon ProductionsLLC, 2006]

Conclusion

Jesus provided a way of escape for faithful Jews (who became Christians) to know when Rome was about to destroy Jerusalem and the practice of the Mosaic Law. This should be a real faith-builder for Christians today. It was a logical extension because God had always provided a way of escape for his people in trying circumstances. In Ezekiel 9, God marked his people so the Babylonians wouldn't destroy them in the destruction of Jerusalem. In Ac. 18.9-10, Jesus told Paul in Corinth not to be afraid, for "no man shall set on thee to harm thee." In Jn. 18.8, at his own arrest, Jesus expressed concern for the safety of his apostles. Likewise, in Matthew 24, Jesus provided protection for the faithful. As Paul said in I Cor. 10.13:

> There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it.

Appendix 3

The Theme of Imminent Judgment After the Gospels

The two previous chapters have traced the thread of imminent Messianic judgment through the gospels to the climax of that judgment in the Olivet Discourse, respectively. In this chapter, we now want to trace the same thread through the New Testament books after the gospels. As in that previous chapter, this study will not be exhaustive, but should give the reader this significant theme in the rest of the New Testament.

Acts 2

Although we have discussed Peter's quotation of Joel 2.28-32 in Acts 2 extensively in our material on Matthew 25, we discuss it briefly here as it occurred after the gospel accounts. Again, Peter affirmed that the disciples on Pentecost were not drunken as charged, but that what was occurring was what Joel foretold happening in "the last days." As he further quotes Joel, he uses language that was common to the Olivet Discourse, discussed in the previous chapter. Although Peter stops quoting at Joel 2.32a, as we saw in the previous chapter, Joel said in Joel 2.32b that the judgment he foretold was escapable, as Jesus himself instructed his disciples to "flee to the mountains" in Mt. 24.15-16, and as history records that they did. Joel, and Peter's quotation of him in Ac. 2.20, spoke of "the coming of the great and notable day of the Lord," when this judgment would take place, and warned his guilt-struck listeners to "save yourselves from this wicked generation," by escaping when the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem. Of course, as we've seen, Jesus foretold Jerusalem's judgment and destruction in his generation.

Ac. 24.25

In this text, we have Paul's encounter with the Roman governor of Judea, Felix, which probably took place shortly before 60 AD:

> And as he reasoned of righteousness, and self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was terrified

Paul's warning about the judgment to come was literally, the judgment "about" to come [Gr. *krimatos tou mellontos*—SGD]. Various lexicons affirm that *mello* with the infinitive is the strongest indication of imminence in the Greek language. Hence, this passage certainly falls within our search for passages indicating imminent judgment in the first century. As politicians are always desirous of national stability, Felix was certainly terrified of such a catastrophe, as would any politician of our day.

Heb. 6.4-8

In this passage, we find the Hebrews writer (probably in the first quarter of the 60s AD) giving a blunt warning to his Jewish listeners who, because of persecution, are contemplating abandoning the way of Christ and returning to Judaism:

> 4 For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age [lit., "about"—SGD] to come, 6 and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

Now notice how he characterizes the judgment that's about to come to them if they don't repent:

> 7 For the land which hath drunk the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them for whose sake it is also tilled, receiveth blessing from God: 8 but if it beareth thorns and thistles, it is rejected and nigh unto a curse; whose end is to be burned.

Isn't this the same warning of fiery judgment for unfruitfulness that was given by Malachi (that would occur at the day of the Lord), John the Baptist ("the axe lieth at the root of the tree," and the judge's "winnowing fan is in his hand"), and Jesus himself ("while some of you are still alive," Mt. 16.27-28, and "this generation," Mt. 24.29, 34)? Obviously, it is.

Heb. 10.24-39

We now notice a passage used nearly universally to admonish Christians for not attending every service of their local church. While the problem the Hebrews author addresses may certainly include an abandonment of collective religious service, I believe we'll see it is so much more significant than that.

We first consider Heb 10.24-25:

> 24 and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh.

Notice the three times the author says, "let us" to his readers: "Let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith" (v22); and "let us hold fast the confession of our hope"(v23). Both of these are in contrast to shrinking back out of regard to the persecution they were suffering from their Jewish countrymen. Then in v24 he says, "let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works, not forsaking our own assembling together."

Usually, this assembling is taken to be the weekly local assemblies. This assembling could certainly include those local assemblies, but as we'll see, this position drastically shortchanges the teaching of this passage.

The word for assembling here is *episynagogue*, an emphatic form of *synagogue*, an assembling. It is generally translated "gathering." The gathering of Jews scattered by the various captivities of Old Covenant Israel, along with Gentile Christians now obeying the gospel in the New Covenant age was an important theme in Messianic prophecy. In Isa. 11.9-12, a passage quoted by Paul in Rom. 15.12 as fulfilled in his taking the gospel to Gentiles in his missionary journies. Isaiah foretold the gathering of Gentiles and Jews by the Messiah in the *last days*

of the Mosaic age. Likewise, in Isa. 49. 5-7, and 56.6-8, Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would gather Old Covenant Israelites.

In Hos. 1.10-11, Hosea foretold that the sons of Israel would be gathered together by the Messiah, as is evidenced by quotations of these passages as fulfilled in I Pet. 2.10 and Rom. 9.24, 26. In Jn. 11.47-52, the leaders of the Jews, confronted by Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead, reasoned:

> 47 The chief priests therefore and the Pharisees gathered a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many signs. 48 If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation. 49 But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, 50 nor do ye take account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. 51 Now this he said not of himself: but, being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation; 52 and not for the nation only, but *that he might also gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad.*

This "gathering" of scattered Jews, some of whom had become Gentiles, was much more significant than weekly assemblies some think are the topic in Heb. 10.24-25. This was the gathering that the prophets foretold that the Messiah would accomplish in Israel's last days. This is the very gathering that Jesus stated he wanted to accomplish in Mt. 23.37:

> O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have *gathered* thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

Yet the Jews in the main wouldn't have it. Again, in Mt. 24.31, Jesus said:

> And he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall *gather together his elect* from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

This gathering was not assemblies of local congregations of Christians, but the Messianic gathering of Jews and Gentiles into the one body of Christ.

This is the great assembling (a singular assembling, not weekly assemblies) the Hebrew Christians were in danger of abandoning in Heb. 10.25. When the Hebrews author spoke of forsaking this assembling, he said they were doing it "as ye see *the day* drawing near." Popularly, "the day" is taken to be the first day of the week, Does the first day of the week fit the author's exhortation to do so "so much the more as ye see the day drawing nigh? Do any of us exhort each other more on Fridays than we do on Tuesdays? Have we ever even conceived of it? There's a much greater day in the context:

> 26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries.

It's evident that "the day" the Hebrews author refers to is a day having *a certain fearful expectation of judgment*; it's a day where a *fierceness of fire shall devour the adversaries*, i.e., unbelieving Jews. Why wouldn't it be the day of the Lord of Malachi 3.4, the "great and terrible day of the Lord" foretold by Joel and quoted by Peter in Ac. 2.20? Why wouldn't it be "the great day of God, the Almighty" of Rev. 16.15 against the harlot city (v19), "wherein their Lord was crucified" (11.8), Old Covenant Jerusalem, the head of "the perverse generation" of Ac. 2.40?

The author of Hebrews continues:

> 28 A man that hath set at nought Moses' law dieth without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses: 29 of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

One who abandons weekly assemblies doesn't necessarily at all count the blood of the covenant as unholy, nor does he despise the Holy Spirit. However, the Jewish Christians addressed in Hebrews contemplated avoiding persecution were doing those very things!

Moreover, in vv. 30-31, the author of Hebrews says:

> 30 For we know him that said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

It is particularly interesting that v30 is quoted directly only from Dt. 32.35, and v31 is quoted only from Dt. 32.36. This is significant because Deuteronomy 32, the song of Moses, deals with the final end of Old Covenant Israel, as we saw in the chapter on imminent judgment in the gospels!

As a matter of fact, consider Dt. 32.34-36, and notice the similarity of that passage with our current text:

> 35 Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, In due time their foot will slip; For *the day of their calamity is near*, And the impending things are hastening upon them. 36 For the LORD will vindicate His people, And will have compassion on His servants; When He sees that their strength is gone, And there is none remaining, bond or free.

This "day of calamity" is "the day" the Christians in Hebrews could see approaching. It was the day when the righteous would be vindicated and the ungodly would be destroyed. This is also the context of Heb. 10.37, our present text:

> For yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry.

Certainly the Hebrews author is speaking of then imminent coming of the Messiah, the coming spoken of by Malachi, John the Baptist, and Jesus himself in Mt. 16.27-28 (in the lifetime of some of his disciples), and Mt. 24.30, 34 (in his generation). Surely Jesus did come in judgment on Jerusalem in literally a very very little while (*mikron hoson hoson*), and wasn't speaking of a coming still future to us. That would be over 2000 years of tarrying!

In conclusion on this passage, the author is speaking of persecuted Jewish Christians on the verge of abandoning the way of Christ with his last days Messianic gathering of Jews and Gentiles foretold by the prophets as the great day of the Lord (spoken of by Malachi, John the

Baptist, and Jesus) was just on the horizon, probably less than five years away.

Jas. 5.1-9

Now notice James' warnings to Jewish Christians of his time, these words being written about 60 AD:

> 1 Come now, ye rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and your silver are rusted; and their rust shall be for a testimony against you, and shall eat your flesh *as fire*. Ye have laid up your treasure *in the last days*.

The Jewish abuse of riches is a prevalent theme of Jesus' dealings with the Jews, the entire chapter of Luke 16 dealing with the subject. Notice the time reference when they would receive fiery punishment for their misuse of money in the last days, i.e., as we've seen, the last days of the Mosaic age.

In vv4-5, James continues:

> 4 Behold, the hire of the laborers who mowed your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth out: and the cries of them that reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth [hosts--SGD]. 5 Ye have lived delicately on the earth, and taken your pleasure; ye have nourished your hearts in a *day of slaughter*.

What do you suppose this fiery last days "day of slaughter" is, if not for the coming judgment foretold by Malachi (who spoke of the Messiah judging Israel as a *refiner's fire*), John the Baptist (who said he would separate the wheat from the chaff, burning the chaff with *unquenchable fire*), and Jesus (who said he came to *bring fire on the land*)?

In vv6-9, James concludes:

> 6 Ye have condemned, ye have killed the righteous one; he doth not resist you. 7 Be patient therefore, brethren, *until the coming of the Lord*. Behold, *the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth*, being patient over it, until it receive the early and latter rain. 8 Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for *the*

> *coming of the Lord is at hand*. 9 Murmur not, brethren, one against another, that ye be not judged: behold, *the judge standeth before the doors*.

Still speaking of imminent judgment coming on these Jews, James speaking of Christ's at-hand coming, which Jesus said would occur during the lifetime of his disciples, and in his generation. He invokes the figure of harvest and destruction for unfruitfulness, spoken of by Malachi, John the Baptist, and Jesus, and said the judge was standing before the door—an imminent judgment. To those who think this judgment hasn't yet taken place we ask, "Just how long do you think Christ has to stand at the door? Couldn't he at least have a seat and put his fan down for a little while after standing there holding it for two thousand years?

I Peter 4.5, 7

Another indication of imminent judgment in the rest of the New Testament is found in this passage, where Peter refers to Christians...

> 5 who shall give account to him that is *ready to judge* the living and the dead...7 But *the end of all things is at hand*: be ye therefore of sound mind, and be sober unto prayer:

Peter says Jesus is ready to judge these Christians. This is parallel to James saying that the judge is about to judge, and he's standing at the door. It's also parallel to Jesus' statement in Lk. 21.20-22, where in connection with the Roman seige of Jerusalem, he said:

> 20 But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand. 21 Then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains; and let them that are in the midst of her depart out; and let not them that are in the country enter therein. 22 *For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.*

Thus, when Peter speaks of "the end of all things" being at hand, again, this is not a prophecy of a judgment still not having taken place more than 2000 years later, but one on the verge of taking place in their first century time.

I Peter 4.17-18

Peter says the same thing in I Pet. 4.17-18:

> For the *time is come for judgment* to begin at the house of God: and if it begin first at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?

Again, Peter is speaking of a judgment not way off down yonder at the end of time, but one which was on their very doorstep in the mid to late sixties AD. Peter affirms that the imminent judgment will involve both the righteous and the ungodly; all were going through the great tribulation.

When Peter says that the righteous will scarcely be saved, he's not saying that God just barely gives enough grace to enable the righteous to squeak into heaven. This statement is equivalent to what Jesus said about the same judgment in Mt. 24.22:

> And *except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved*: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

II Peter 2.9

> the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment;

Peter's instruction concerning the approaching judgment from the previous passage is undoubtedly the same judgment he speaks of here, the one the time had come for. It was also the one Malachi had warned of in chapters 3-4, the one John the Baptist had warned about in Mt. 3.11, and Jesus taught concerning in Matthew 24-25. As Peter taught here that the Lord knows how to deliver the godly, so it was during the days of Noah, the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, and at the destruction of Jerusalem, when the watchful could see the sign Jesus gave his disciples, and could escape by fleeing to the mountains.

I Jn. 2.18

John cites the same scheme in this passage.

> Little children, *it is the last hour*: and as ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that *it is the last hour*.

Obviously, the last hour of the physical universe, or the last hour of time itself, wasn't the thing John was teaching. Nor was he teaching the last hour of the last day of the last days of the endless age of Christ (as we've seen "no end" in Isa. 9.6 and Lk. 1.33). However, the Mosaic age had all of these: last days, a last day, and a last hour, and John exhorts his readers that the time is upon them.

Revelation 1.1-3

John also speaks of imminent judgment in this book. We begin by considering John's statements of the time element of the book in Rev. 1.1-3:

> 1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show unto his servants, even the things *which must shortly come to pass*: and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John; 2 who bare witness of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw. 3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein: for *the time is at hand*.

A major theme of this book is the imminent judgment of a harlot city, spiritually called Sodom and Egypt (11.8), wherein their Lord was crucified. After it's destruction in chapter 18, the harlot city was replaced in chapter 21.2, 10 by New Jerusalem, which is spoken of as the holy city. This replacement of the harlot city by the holy city, New Jerusalem, would, for no other reason, make us strongly suspicious that the old harlot city was Old Covenant Jerusalem. The evidence is compounded by John's statement that the harlot city is where the Lord was crucified, again, Old Covenant Jerusalem. The popular view that Revelation was written in the last decade of the first century cannot be made

to fit an imminent destruction of Jerusalem. The destruction of the city "wherein their lord was crucified" was absolutely not imminent!

Thus, Revelation was written shortly before Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70, and when the fulfillment of prophecies concerning it's judgment were at hand. Thus, the time element for its Revelation's writing and Jerusalem's destruction were synchronous with John the Baptist and Jesus' pronunciations of judgment upon her—in their generation, the first century AD.

Revelation 1.7

John also gives this piece of evidence at the beginning of his book:

> Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him.

This statement about Jesus coming with the clouds, we've seen foretold in Mt. 16.27-28 to occur in the lifetime of some of his disciples, and in Mt. 24.29, 34, in his generation. Jesus said he would come "in the glory of the father," that is, as the father had come in the Old Testament. The father had come in glory many times, yet never physically. He came through the agency of nations he used to carry out his judgments on the wicked.

This verse is based on a prophecy in Zech. 12.10, which said:

> And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that *they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son*, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born.

Continuing on into Zechariah 13, the prophet continues:

> *In that day* a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity.

"In that day" in 13.1 is at the same time as 12.10, in the first century, the time when Jesus was crucified, and the fountain (of blood) was opened for sin and for impurity. In other words, the at-hand and short-

ly-to-come-to-pass coming of Revelation was in the generation before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Revelation 22.6, 10, 12

At the conclusion of Revelation, John gives more evidence of the imminence of Christ's coming and judgment.

> 6 And he said unto me, These words are faithful and true: and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angels to show unto his servants *the things which must shortly come to pass*10 And he saith unto me, Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book; for *the time is at hand* 12 Behold, *I come quickly*; and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is.

Thus, not only does John frame the coming and judgment of his book in his first-century time frame, but he closes the book in the same way. Of course, Jesus' statements that he is coming for judgment in the first century is the same as his teaching in Mt. 16.27-28 that he was coming in glory for judgment during the lifetime of some of his disciples, as well as Mt. 25.31-46 that he was coming in glory for judgment in the last days of the Mosaic age, as we saw in the previous chapter of this work.

Conclusion

This chapter concludes our three chapter study on the imminent coming and judgment of Christ *in the gospels*, climaxing with the Olivet Discourse, and the imminent coming and judgment of Christ *after the gospels*.

Appendix 4

The Importance of the Old Testament to New Testament Christians

Human beings are creatures of extremes, and even Bible students go to extremes. For example, when we encounter a doctrinal error that repulses us, many times we go to an opposite doctrinal error to combat it. Thus, when someone confronts the Calvinistic doctrine of individual predestination for salvation, he may be repelled to the extent that he believes that the Bible doesn't teach predestination at all. In so doing, he is just as wrong as the doctrine he opposes, for the Bible certainly teaches that God predestined to save all those in Christ, i.e., those who exercise their free will, hear and obey the gospel, and live faithfully therein.

Likewise, one may hear the emphasis on salvation by faith alone, and be dismayed by the ungodly lives of some who believe that no sin they commit from idolatry to murder may endanger their souls. Such a realization may make him recoil to the extreme belief that we're not even saved by faith. This would be a false conclusion. A person may also be disgusted by the doctrine of "once saved, always saved" to the point that he loses confidence in his salvation by God. Again, this is a gross overreaction to doctrinal error and exaggeration of the Bible's teaching on the subject.

Thus, when some denominational doctrines are based upon indiscriminate use of the Mosaic Covenant for practices in the present time (e.g., tithing and keeping the sabbath), we often quickly demonstrate that we are not under the Mosaic Covenant. We use Rom. 7.4 to show we're dead to the Mosaic Law, including the ten commandments, one of which Paul quoted in this very passage. We also use Gal. 5.18 to

show that if we're led by the Holy Spirit, we're not under the Mosaic Covenant.

Many New Testament Christians take these passages to such an extreme that; as a result, they are woefully ignorant of the Old Covenant. While Jesus said in Mt. 5.17-19 that he didn't come to destroy the law or the prophets, practically speaking, many Christians destroy it for themselves. Most would not know less of it than if our Lord had absolutely obliterated it. We go beyond Jesus' and Paul's teaching and begin to have no use for the Old Testament at all. I've heard several Christians say that it would have been better if God had destroyed the Old Testament, since misuse of it causes so much confusion in the religious world. To a large degree, this has happened in many churches.

In this chapter, we explore six New Testament principles that demonstrate the value of the Old Testament to Christians to see that we should not go to the extreme of rejecting this important teaching from God.

The Old Testament Is Inspired of God

First, the Old Testament is of great importance to Christians because it is inspired of God. In II Tim. 3.16-17, Paul said:

> Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.

"All scripture" inspired of God includes the Old Testament, whose books comprise approximately seventy-five percent of the totality of inspired literature on earth. If we neglect the Old Testament, we ignore the vast majority of an extremely scarce resource. One cannot imagine a serious student of Shakespeare not showing any interest in seventy-five percent of Shakespeare's work, because so little of his material exists. Likewise with inspired material: there is so little of it on earth that disciples of Christ cannot afford to overlook the inspired scripture in the Old Testament.

The apostle Peter also affirmed the inspiration of the Old Testament. In 1 Pet. 1.10-11, he said:

> Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ [the Spirit which Christ sent, the Holy Spirit—SGD] which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them.

Thus, the Old Testament is every bit as inspired by the Holy Spirit as is the New Testament. Imagine a Christian who affirmed that the New Testament wasn't inspired by God. "What a heretic!" we would correctly say. Peter declared that the Old Testament is just as inspired; and therefore, as worthy of our interest and serious study as is the New Testament. In Heb. 10.15-17, the author said:

> And the Holy Spirit also beareth witness to us; for after he hath said, This is the covenant that I will make with them After those days, saith the Lord: I will put my laws on their heart, And upon their mind also will I write them; then saith he, And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

The author of Hebrews stated that the Holy Spirit agreed with his point. For proof, he quoted the Old Testament passage of Jer. 31.31-34 for the witness of the Holy Spirit. The writer based his entire argument on his understanding that the Old Testament was inspired by the Holy Spirit. In Heb. 3.7, he said again:

> Wherefore, even as the Holy Spirit saith, To-day if ye shall hear his voice...

The quotation in Hebrews comes from the Old Testament, in Ps. 95.7, which was inspired by the Holy Spirit, just as the book of Hebrews was. Similarly, in II Pet. 1.21, Peter said:

> For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit.

Here Peter affirmed that the Holy Spirit moved men to prophesy in the Old Testament in the same fashion as he did the prophets in the New Testament. Jesus even claimed such in Mt. 22.41-44:

> Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, What think ye of the Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Till I put thine enemies underneath thy feet?

Jesus claimed that the Holy Spirit moved David to call his own son "Lord" or the Messiah. Thus, Jesus understood that the Holy Spirit dictated the prophet David's words, just as he inspired the apostles' teaching in the New Testament.

Obviously, serious students cannot afford to neglect the seventy-five percent of inspired teaching found in the Old Testament.

Christians Need to Imitate Believers in the New Testament

Second, Christians need to be serious students of the Old Testament to imitate Christians of the first century. Many nondenominational Christians today claim they are imitating New Testament Christians in their local church organization, doctrine, worship, work, and treatment of each other. However, if they do not imitate the early Christians in their attitude and conduct toward the Old Testament, they fail in their imitation of the New Testament way of Christ. Jesus taught the Jews, who became the first Christians, from the Old Testament. For example, after Jesus' resurrection, he appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They didn't recognize him, so they conversed with Jesus as they would any stranger. In Lk. 24.13-27, we read:

> And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was threescore furlongs from Jerusalem. And they communed with each other of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, while they communed and questioned together, that Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What communications are these that ye have one with another, as ye walk? And they stood still, looking sad. And one of them, named Cleopas, answering said unto him, Dost

> thou alone sojourn in Jerusalem and not know the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, The things concerning Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we hoped that it was he who should redeem Israel. Yea and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things came to pass. Moreover certain women of our company amazed us, having been early at the tomb; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. And certain of them that were with us went to the tomb, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not. And he said unto them, O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Behooved it not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory? *And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.* [Emphasis mine—SGD]

Notice that Jesus instructed these Jewish disciples out of Old Testament texts that they were familiar with. Had we been walking with these three, would we have shared their background in the Old Testament, so we could appreciate who Jesus really was? If not, that's just how far we are from being like Christians in the New Testament.

The apostles and prophets in the first century taught from the Old Testament, as well. In Ac. 15.13-16, James taught his brethren, including the apostles, concerning the place of circumcision of the Gentiles in the Messiah's kingdom, and he did it from the Old Testament:

> And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Brethren, hearken unto me: Symeon [Peter—SGD] hath rehearsed how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After these things I will return, And I will build again

> the tabernacle of David, which is fallen; And I will build again the ruins thereof, And I will set it up:...

This account gives three proofs that the gospel was to be taken to the Gentiles without binding circumcision on them. This is significant because not only does the Bible teach in these three ways, but also all literature teaches in these three ways, including the Sears Catalog. First, Peter gave a *necessary implication* (an inescapable conclusion) that God had approved of his preaching to Gentiles without binding circumcision (by the miracles which he performed by God's power). Second, Paul and Barnabas reported to the church their *example* of preaching to Gentiles without binding circumcision on them. Third, James cinched the teaching by giving a *direct statement* from the Old Testament concerning Gentiles coming into the kingdom. How would that have set with us? Would we have believed James? Or would we have reacted as many today, "We would be better off if we didn't even have the Old Testament?" Hopefully, not. The Old Testament was greatly important to even Gentile Christians in the New Testament because it helped determine whether or not they needed to be circumcised.

Today, we encounter Christians who want to study Revelation without properly preparing from the Old Testament. Their demand compares to a second grader, who has just learned to add two and two, wanting to study algebra because he's tired of arithmetic. Algebra books weren't written for students who just learned how to add, and Revelation wasn't written to Christians who knew only the ABCs of the New Testament. Revelation was written to the seven churches of Asia, which were composed of both Jewish and Gentile Christians who understood the Old Testament. Their knowledge of the Old Testament allowed John to write the book in a special code that gave them encouragement, but their enemies, who were persecuting them, couldn't understand it.

Without that same background, Christians today are no more prepared to receive the message of that great book than were the enemies of first-century Christians from which Revelation's message was hidden. Their lack of knowledge of the Old Testament makes them potential dupes for just about any false private theory of Revelation that comes along. It's ironic that in this regard such Christians imitate the enemies of first-century Christians more than the Christians of that time. Surely, we can see that it's impossible to be like Christians in the New Testament without sharing their Old Testament knowledge.

The Old Testament Is Profitable for Doctrine, Reproof, and Correction

Third, Christians today need to be serious Old Testament students because it's profitable for doctrine, reproof, and correction. In II Tim. 3.16-17, Paul said:

> Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.

Paul affirmed that "every" scripture is profitable, not just those of the New Testament, but the Old Testament, too. In Rom. 15.4 the same apostle said:

> For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope.

So the things written aforetime in the Old Testament were written for the learning of Christians in the New Testament. They were written to be learned, to produce hope and encouragement. The most familiar verse on the relation of the Old Testament to Christians is found in I Cor. 10.1-11:

> For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual food; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of a spiritual rock that followed them: and the rock was Christ. Howbeit with most of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in

> one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us make trial of the Lord, as some of them made trial, and perished by the serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them murmured, and perished by the destroyer. Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come.

While we appreciate Paul's emphasizing the importance of the Old Testament examples against personal frailties, those ancient examples form most of the Bible's teaching by example. Were we students of the New Testament alone, we would have precious few examples of the people of God to learn from, perhaps less than ten percent of what we now have. This demonstrates the great importance of the Old Testament to New Testament Christians. Thus, we read in Lev. 10.1-2:

> And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took each of them his censer, and put fire therein, and laid incense thereon, and offered strange fire before Jehovah, which he had not commanded them. And there came forth fire from before Jehovah, and devoured them, and they died before Jehovah.

These sons of Aaron the High Priest were prominent men in Israel, and when they offered a sacrifice "which he had not commanded them," God took their lives. What does this example teach? Before we answer, consider what occurs when we buy and remodel a house, either by adding or subtracting features from it. We always change it to make the house better, not worse. No one ever noticed an exception to this principle. Likewise, consider why a woman modifies a recipe. As she reads through the recipe, she decides that since the original recipe omitted a certain ingredient, she will add it. Why does she change the recipe? To make the dish worse, or better? Without exception, the only reason we change recipes is to make them better.

Why do you suppose Aaron's sons changed God's recipe for sacrifices? Were they imposters, surreptitiously trying to sabotage the worship of God? Of course not. All the evidence shows they were sincerely striving to enhance the worship of God and make it better. This Old Testament example teaches that when we take it upon ourselves to make the worship of God better than what he commanded, God doesn't appreciate such arrogance.

In the familiar story of Saul in I Samuel 15, God commanded the king to destroy the Amalekites, and reduce the whole people to destruction. This Saul did except that he diverted some of the best animals to sacrifice to God. In vv. 17-23, the prophet Samuel revealed to Saul (and to us) God's reaction to these sacrifices Saul wanted to offer:

> And Samuel said, Is it not true, though you were little in your own eyes, you were made the head of the tribes of Israel? And the Lord anointed you king over Israel, and the Lord sent you on a mission, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are exterminated. Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord, but rushed upon the spoil and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord?

Then Saul said to Samuel, "I did obey the voice of the Lord, and went on the mission on which the Lord sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God at Gilgal." And Samuel said:

> Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king. [Emphasis mine—SGD]

God, speaking through his prophet Samuel, told us exactly what he thinks forever of those who change or originate procedures for honoring him. God wants obedience more than our own conjured-up sacrifices. When we change the recipe, God said it's as the sin of divination, purely human worship, and insubordination, or rebellion against God. Such attitudes toward God resulted in Saul losing his kingship.

Is there any use for this example to Christians? We can clearly know what God thinks of such insubordination in our time, can't we?

One last example from the Old Testament is Num. 24.13 where God's prophet Balaam said to an ungodly king who was trying to bribe him to curse an enemy:

> Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything contrary to the command of the Lord, either good or bad, of my own accord. What the Lord speaks, that I will speak.

On this occasion the wicked king attempted to get Balaam to do something bad, i.e., curse his enemy, but Balaam's answer revealed that he wouldn't do anything, good or bad, of his own accord.

Examples like these help us understand New Testament passages that teach the same principle. In II Jn. 9, John said:

> Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son.

The words translated "transgresseth" (KJV) or "goeth onward" mean "to step over a boundary." John insisted that when we step over the boundary of Christ's teaching we have not God; we are no longer in fellowship with God, and he no longer dwells in us. (For a complete discussion of this passage, see Appendix 4, "II John 9 and the Teaching of Christ," of the author's book *Fellowship: With God and His People, The Way of Christ Without Denominationalism.*) More than that, the examples of the Old Testament help Christians understand that this teaching is not new.

Likewise, in I Pet. 4.11, Peter said:

> ...if any man speaketh, speaking as it were oracles of God; if any man ministereth, ministering as of the strength which God supplieth: *that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ,* whose is the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen. [Emphasis mine—SGD]

We glorify God when we use Bible language to describe our beliefs and service as he prescribed in his word. When we barge outside his word to do things of our own accord, God is not glorified by our insubordination.

Another passage indicates that the Old Testament is even more profitable for New Testament Christians than it was for the Jews to whom it was originally given. Consider carefully I Pet. 1.10-12, where Peter said:

> Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them. To whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto you, did they minister these things, which now have been announced unto you through them that preached the gospel unto you by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven; which things angels desire to look into.

Notice that Peter said that the Old Testament prophets revealed their prophecies "not unto themselves, but unto you, did they minister these things." This "not...but" construction is a form of ellipsis which has the literal meaning of "not only"..."but also" with the emphasis on the second item. Thus, Peter taught that the Old Testament prophets gave their teaching "not only" for themselves and the people of their time, "but also" and mainly for New Testament Christians. In other words, Isaiah's teaching was more for us than for the Jews of his time. So with the teaching of Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, etc. We could hardly be more wrong than to think that the Old Testament is not tremendously important to us. (For a further discussion of this form of ellipsis, please see Chapter 17, "Ellipsis: Speaking Where the Bible Is Silent,") of the author's *How to Study the Bible: A Practical Guide to Independent Bible Study*

Christians Are Commanded to Study the Old Testament

Fourth, New Testament Christians ought to be serious students of the Old Testament because we're plainly commanded to study it. In II Pet. 3.2, Peter said:

> ...that ye should remember the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and the commandments of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles: ...

In II Pet. 1.19, he said:

> And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts:...

Speaking of Old Testament prophecies, Peter affirmed that we have something even more surely than the Old Testament people of God did. We not only have the prophecies, we have the prophecies along with their fulfiliments! Thus, Peter demonstrated that we should take heed unto those Old Testament teachings. These are passages Christians must obey or be in rebellion.

What Are Old Testament Christians?

Fifth, we might think that there is no such thing as an Old Testament Christian, but there most certainly is. We should be serious students of the Old Testament because Christians are mentioned so much in it. That's correct—Christ's New Testament people are described in prophetic statements. We understand that Christ was foretold and depicted in the Old Testament. We can examine those prophecies, and if Jesus doesn't fit the inspired descriptions, he was an imposter. The same is true of us. Just as the Old Testament bore witness of Jesus, it also bears witness of Christians. We are also portrayed in the Old Testament, and if examination shows that we don't fit the Old Testament's profile of the Messiah's people, we are the imposters, and not the true Christians of prophesy.

Old Testament Christians Are Thoroughly Acquainted with God

Jeremiah, in Jer. 31.31-34, prophesied that the Messiah's people would be thoroughly acquainted with God:

> Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the

> house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith Jehovah. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith Jehovah: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people: and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more.

In the Old Testament, one didn't have to be thoroughly acquainted with God before being in covenant relationship with him. For example, a Jewish baby was born in covenant relationship with God knowing nothing of God. Later on, he became familiar with God as he learned what the covenant was, what his responsibilities were, etc. Not so in the way of Christ. We must first be disciples, students, even before we obey the gospel and become Christians as Jeremiah prophesied. This is an argument against sprinkling infants, who do not know God, to bring them into fellowship with God. In Jn. 6.44-45, Jesus said:

> No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him: and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me.

After saying that God must draw an individual to himself before he can come to Christ, Jesus explained from the Old Testament prophets how God draws a person, by his being taught the gospel. The way of Christ is a religion that is taught, then learned. Babies are neither taught nor do they learn.

Jeremiah also said that the Messiah's people would have God's law on their hearts. Is that true of you and me, or is the law still on the pages of the book of God, and the book on the shelf? If God's law isn't on our heart, we're not the caliber of people prophesied of in the Old Testament.

In I Pet. 3.15, Peter instructed Christians:

> ...but sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord: being ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear: ...

A good test for finding out if God's law is on our heart is to ask ourselves if we can obey this command. Can we give answer to every man concerning our hope in Christ? Many times Christians can quote statistics on baseball, basketball, cars, etc., but not on matters related to their faith. If that is our problem, then God's law is not in our heart, and we're not the kind of Christians foretold in the Old Testament.

Old Testament Christians Offer Themselves Willingly

In Ps. 110.1-4, an entirely Messianic psalm, the Messiah's people, Christians, are spoken of in this way:

> Jehovah saith unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. Jehovah will send forth the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people offer themselves willingly in the day of thy power, in holy array: out of the womb of the morning Thou hast the dew of thy youth. Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent: Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

Christians are described as those who "offer themselves willingly" for the Messiah's service. This characteristic again shows the impropriety of infant sprinkling, as infants are not offering themselves willingly. Christians are not forced, browbeaten, or badgered into obeying, attending the services of the local church, or participating in its work. If they are, God doesn't desire their service. God is only glorified if people deliberately use their free will to choose to serve him. We are to be as Isaiah was when he answered God's quest for a faithful worker: "Here I am, send me" (Isa. 6.8). Does that fit you and me? Do we volunteer freely to serve Christ? Do we do what we have the opportunity and ability to do? If not, that's just how far we are from being Old Testament Christians, i.e., Christians prophesied in the Old Testament.

Old Testament Christians Lose Their Animal Nature in Christ

Isaiah prophesied of New Testament Christians, in Isa. 11.6-10, when he foretold of the lion and the lamb lying down together in the Messiah's kingdom:

> And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the root of Jesse, that standeth for an ensign of the peoples, unto him shall the nations seek; and his resting-place shall be glorious.

Premillennialists view this passage as unfulfilled because they don't see literal wolves dwelling with literal lambs. Thus, they falsely conclude that the Messiah's kingdom is not in place, but will be established when he comes again. They're looking for entirely the wrong kind of kingdom. Paul quoted verse 10 of Isaiah's prophecy as fulfilled in Rom. 15.12 where the "root of Jesse," Jesus, is ruling over the Gentiles. Paul wasn't speaking of literal animals getting along with each other, but of Christians who lost their animal nature in Christ, so that natural enmities between Jewish and Gentile Christians were done away because of their knowledge of God. Paul referred to this same process in Eph. 2.16-17 when he spoke of Jews and Gentiles in Christ:

> ...and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and he came and preached peace to you that were far off [Gentiles—SGD], and peace to them that were nigh [Jews—SGD]: ...

These verses describe how in Christ both Jews and Gentiles lost their animal nature, their natural ferociousness toward each other, as a

result of the knowledge of Jehovah. In my years of preaching, I had the opportunity to encounter many examples of such "animals" lying down together in the kingdom of Christ.

I recall preaching in the mid 80s in a community far from where I lived. Early in the week, I met an ex-Hell's Angel (a member of a California motorcycle gang not known for its sensitivity and gentleness), and a deputy sheriff in the same congregation. They didn't know each other's background until I had gotten acquainted with them both and later brought it to their attention.

They discovered that they had both fought in some of the same riots in southern California. The deputy sheriff related how he had kicked members of the Hell's Angels until he was too tired to kick any more. The member of the Hell's Angels described the tricks they used to beat up the deputy sheriffs. The more they visited, the more it appeared that they had actually fought with each other. Yet, as a result of the knowledge of Jehovah, they were laboring together in a local church. They had both lost their animal nature in Christ. Such cases rarely occur outside the kingdom of the Messiah.

On another occasion, I encountered a Hispanic Christian and a Negro Christian in the same congregation. Hispanics and Negroes aren't renowned for getting along together, but these two Christians fully appreciated each other. As a matter of fact, the Hispanic was a police officer, and he told a story of a Negro suspect running away from him to a white police officer, saying, "There's a Mexican chasing me!" Both of these brethren could laugh at that story, and became good friends and co-workers in the same local church. They exemplified Christians who had lost their adversarial nature in Christ, as outside of Christ, they might have assaulted each other over that same story. Isaiah's prophecy depicted this type of Christians.

In another state, I met a national executive with a major petroleum corporation working in the same congregation as an environmental activist who was a professor at a major university. In fact, these two men served as pillars in the congregation. Normally, environmental activists and petroleum-company executives don't "lie down together," as relations aren't generally peaceful between them. However, as a result of the knowledge of Jehovah, they worked together in the kingdom of God.

If we can't be in fellowship with a former horrible sinner, one of another race, or one of a widely different background, we're not Old Testament Christians. We're not the caliber of people Isaiah prophesied

of and described. We haven't lost our animal nature in Christ. Isaiah's description will fit us if we're Christians

Old Testament Christians Renounce the World

Another Messianic psalm, Ps 45.10-11, contains a song celebrating our king's marriage:

> Listen, O daughter, give attention and incline your ear;
> Forget your people and your father's house;
> Then the King will desire your beauty;
> Because He is your Lord, bow down to Him.

These verses describe the Messiah's marriage. In verse 6, we see that the king is deity, a passage quoted and applied to Christ in Heb. 1.5, 8-9. As the psalmist described the Messiah's bride, he referred to New Testament Christians, us! In verse 10, he told the king's bride to "forget your people and your father's house." This is what any spiritual bride ought to do—leave her father and mother, her old spiritual family. As a result, verse 11 says she will be the king's desire, because she has given herself totally to the king.

This, of course, is what the New Testament requires of the Messiah's people—total dedication. Jesus said it this way in Mt. 10.34-37:

> Think not that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law: and a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Jesus said it this way in Lk. 14.26:

> If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

Sometimes people struggle with this verse, thinking Jesus requires us to despise our relatives. They fail to realize that the general meaning of the word "hate" is "to love less." Jesus does require that we love

everything and everybody on earth less than we love him. If we don't, we love him less, or hate him! Not only are we not his disciples if we fail to renounce the world, but we are not Old Testament Christians, either, as total dedication to him is required.

Old Testament Christians Give Their Possessions to God

In Zech. 14.20, a prophecy describes how New Testament Christians will use their possessions:

> In that day there will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "HOLY TO THE LORD." And the cooking pots in the Lord's house will be like the bowls before the altar. And every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the Lord of hosts; and all who sacrifice will come and take of them and boil in them. And there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts in that day.

In Mosaic temple service, everything—the high priest, sacrifices, temple utensils—everything was dedicated to God. This prophecy says "in that day," in the Messiah's time, our time, everything will be dedicated to God. In Ex. 10.24-26, we read an example of this in the account of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt. When Pharaoh finally said they could go if only they would leave their flocks and herds in Egypt, Moses gave his famous answer:

> ...You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice them to the Lord our God. Therefore, our livestock, too, will go with us; not a hoof will be left behind, for we shall take some of them to serve the Lord our God.

The expression "not a hoof will be left behind" refers to the most useless part that glue is made from. Yet Moses said, "We're going to use everything, even the least useful things, our trinkets, to serve our God." This should be true in the reign of the Messiah—even our little trinkets are dedicated to God.

Do we live up to the prophecy of Zechariah? Is it true of you? Me? If not, that's just how far we are from being the Messiah's people.

The Old Testament contains many other prophecies of New Testament Christians. Perhaps this sampling will help convince us all that the Old Testament is of tremendous importance to New Testament Christians because it describes how we should think and act.

Christians Are Not Perfectly Furnished Without the Old Testament

Sixth, in II Tim. 3.16-17, we find that Christians are not complete if they ignore the Old Testament:

> Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.

In order for us to be completely furnished unto everything God wants us to be and do, we must use all scripture, both the Old and New Testaments. For some, this statement causes a problem. One says, "Can't I learn what I need to know to become a Christian with just the New Testament?" The answer, of course, is yes.

Another asks, "Can't we determine what the work of the local church is with only the New Testament?" The answer, again, is yes. Yet Paul said that when one studies just the New Testament, he's missing a lot of teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction which is in righteousness. As a result, without the Old Testament, he's not furnished completely unto every good work.

If challenged, "Tell me how we're not complete or fully qualified to serve God without the Old Testament," we rapidly answer that we cannot fully understand the New Testament without a working knowledge of the Old Testament. How many times does the New Testament say, "that it might be fulfilled which was written..."? This happens literally hundreds of times. Some of the most important passages in the entire Bible, these scriptures give an inspired commentary on other Bible passages.

As someone well said, "The New Testament is the Old Testament revealed; the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed." This is the essence of Paul's comment in Rom. 16.25-26:

> Now to him that is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal, but now is manifested, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, is made known unto all the nations unto obedience of faith:...

Thus, God's mystery, his plan from all eternity to save man in Christ, was concealed in the Old Testament, and is now revealed in the New Testament. In Ac. 3.24, Peter said in the second gospel sermon ever preached:

> Yea and all the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days.

Peter's statement implies that the Old Testament prophets foretold of the rule of Christ, the New Testament age. So without a sound Old Testament background, we are wholly unqualified to be serious students of the New Testament, and we are incomplete as Christians.

Conclusion

Contrary to the common assertion, "The Old Testament is insignificant; we don't need to pay attention to it," in this chapter we've examined six principles from the New Testament that emphasize the importance of the Old Testament to Christians. Without knowledge of the Old Testament, we're not complete or fully equipped to understand the New Testament or to serve God. In further chapters, we'll include the Old Testament in developing a plan for Bible study as we have already deliberated on developing an overall view of the Bible.

Appendix 5

TIMELINE OF ROMAN SIEGE AND DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

509 BC	Roman Republic founded (dissolved 27 BC)
63 BC	Roman general Pompey subdued Judea, becomes a client kingdom
49-44 BC	Julius Caesar first Roman emperor, assassinated in senate for supporting empire.
37-35 BC	Herod the Great builds Antonia Fortress, named after Mark Antony
27BC–14 AD	Augustus Caesar emperor
19 BC	Herod begins rebuilding second temple
14 – 37AD	Tiberius Caesar emperor
28-30 AD	Three year ministry of Jesus
37-41 AD	Caligula emperor (murdered)
41-54 AD	Claudius emperor (murdered)
37 AD	Josephus born in Jerusalem
54-68 AD	Nero emperor (suicide, June 9th)
66 AD	Nero's representative, Gessius Florus attempts to confiscate money from Temple treasure, starts serious rebellion (May).
67 AD	February 10 – Nero orders Vespasian to "destroy the Jews," *Encyclopedia Britannica, XV,* 1911 Edition, pp. 400-402.
68-69 AD	Galba emperor (murdered)
69 AD	Otho emperor (murdered)

69 AD	Vitellius emperor (murdered)
69-79	Vespasian emperor
70 AD	Siege begins on April 14th, daily sacrifices ceased July 17th, Temple burned in Aug, destroyed in Sept
74 AD	Romans conquered Masada
79-81 AD	Titus emperor
81-96 AD	Domitian emperor (murdered)
96-98 AD	Nerva emperor
98-117 AD	Trajan emperor
117-138 AD	Hadrian emperor

Appendix 6

Analysis of the *Gehenna* Passages

Introduction

I read with interest my friend Ed Stevens' article explaining the twelve New Testament *Gehenna* passages in the *Fulfilled!* Summer 2016 issue. He began by saying that those of us who don't believe in the (Roman Catholic–SGD) concept of hell as eternal conscious torment of the lost, have overlooked the words *Gehinnom* in the OT and *Gehenna* in the NT that are commonly translated *hell*. Rather than overlooking these words, my study has led me inescapably to the conclusion that both these terms were proper names of a well-known valley just south of Jerusalem, and they shouldn't have been translated at all, any more than Jerusalem or Bethlehem were. Actually, *they weren't translated* as *hell*! The Catholic scholars in the Anglican Church (that part of the Roman Catholic church stolen by Henry VIII when the pope wouldn't let him marry Anne Boleyn) who translated the KJV merely substituted the theologically-loaded word *hell* for *Gehenna*. This word was loaded with concepts entirely foreign to the word *Gehenna*.

Those scholars had a bad habit of that sort of thing. They translated *presbuteros* (elders) as *priests*, *pascha* (Passover) as *Easter* (once), and *baptizo* (dip, plunge, immerse) as *baptism* (to permit their sprinkling and pouring for baptism into the Bible), and substituted the "divine pronouns" (thee, thou, and thine) for us rather than translating consistently. In each case, they substituted theologically-loaded words for the originals.

Ed's analysis of the twelve instances of *Gehenna* in the NT displays the influence of such substitutions of *hell* (to him meaning eternal conscious torment in the spiritual realm) to those influenced by Roman Catholicism for *Gehenna*, which never included such concepts. Had it not been for such substitutions, none of us would have concluded that Jesus taught anything about eternal conscious torment in a spiritual state.

To be fair, Catholics aren't the only ones to pull such stunts. In Ac. 8.20, where Peter said to Simon the sorcerer, "thy silver perish with thee," *Today's English Version* has him telling Simon to "go to hell." The word *hell* is not there in your Bible; the translators just substituted it, and that's just the point. *Hell's* not in any of them. It was just substituted for *Gehenna* in Bibles with Roman Catholic influence.

Contrary to this, it is said that "these twelve verses demonstrated that gehenna refers primarily (if not exclusively) to the place in the unseen spiritual realm where the souls of the unredeemed will be consciously punished forever." It's very easy to see if this claim is true. We'll just read the twelve passages and see if we see eternal conscious torment in the spiritual realm in even a single one of them.

Matt. 5:22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the supreme court: and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. (NAS)

Look carefully: do you see anything in that entire verse about eternal conscious torment in the spiritual realm? There's not a hint of it, is there? Folks just read that into the word *hell*, just as Roman Catholic scholars intended! Jesus didn't say what *Gehenna* was. He didn't mention the spiritual realm or that anyone would be punished consciously forever. Jesus just said such were in danger of the *Gehenna* of fire, which is what the Jews and I understood: a fiery judgment coming on Jerusalem, whose rubble would end up in *Gehenna.* But it's not Roman Catholic doctrine, which most just unconsciously plug into what Jesus said.

The next six passages noticed are the "eye, hand, and foot" passages, which we can deal with together:

Matt. 5:29, 30, 18:9, Mark 9:43, 45, 47 And if your right eye (or hand or foot) makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for

your whole body (with two eyes, hands, or feet) to be thrown into hell. (NAS)

Does anyone believe people are going to have eyes, feet, and hands in a *spiritual* realm where there is eternal conscious torment? No one that I'm aware of!

Again, looking carefully at each of these passages, Jesus didn't say *hell* – he said *Gehenna*, the nearby location the Jews were thoroughly familiar with. Impenitent Jews were going to end up with their whole bodies cast into *Gehenna* at the destruction of Jerusalem (the time element will be given in another of these passages, momentarily). Note carefully that Jesus didn't mention souls punished consciously forever in a single one of them, did he? Yet Ed says "these twelve verses demonstrated that gehenna refers primarily (if not exclusively) to the place in the unseen spiritual realm where the souls of the unredeemed will be consciously punished forever.

In Mk. 9.43, "*unquenchable fire*" doesn't mean eternal fire, but fire that you can't quench or put out. It's used of national judgment in Ezek. 20.47-48, on Israel in Amos 5.5-6, on Jerusalem in Isa. 66.15-16, and of Babylon's burning of Jerusalem in Jer. 21:10-14. Of course, none of those fires were eternal; none of them are still burning!

Matt. 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (NAS)

While we use this passage many times to prove that the soul of man cannot be destroyed, Jesus plainly affirms that God can (and imminently would, as we're about to see) destroy both soul and body in *Gehenna.* Note that he didn't say, "I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who after He has killed the body, will punish your soul consciously eternally," as many read it. The concepts of conscious, soul, eternal, and torment are not in this passage, either. I'm afraid they are just thinking of those things as they read these verses, which say no such thing!.

Readers of *Fulfilled!* can sympathize with such people, for as we studied I Corinthians 15 to see a first century fulfillment, just reading the chapter still flooded our minds with all the futurist sermons and illustrations we had heard on the resurrection. Our minds performed on that subject as theirs (and perhaps yours) does now on Jesus' use of *Gehenna*, so you can be a good guy and do this! Please take a few moments and read Josh. 11.11, 10.35, 39, where the Jews conquering Canaan destroyed the souls of its inhabitants with the sword. This was

national judgment, not eternal conscious torment in a spiritual realm as many imagine in Mt. 10.28. When Ed asserts, "The physical valley of Hinnom did not affect the soul," surely he's forgotten these occurrences of this very thing in Joshua, and therefore his conclusion that "therefore, gehenna must be a spiritual place in the unseen realm in which souls are brought to everlasting ruin in the afterlife" doesn't follow at all. The Jews listening to Jesus in Mt. 10.28 would have understood such language. They knew from their Old Testament background that God could, and many times had, destroyed both bodies and souls in various national judgments. In Lk. 12.4-5, Luke's account of Mt. 10.28, Jesus spoke of the fiery judgment coming on the Jews when he said in v49, "I came to cast fire *upon the earth* (Gr., *ge*, land); and what do I desire, if it is already kindled?"

Matt. 23:15. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. (NAS)

In this eleventh *Gehenna* passage, Jesus doesn't mention eternal conscious torment in the spiritual realm - not in one syllable. With the help of our Roman Catholic substitution for *Gehenna*, many just read those things into these verses. It's quite a testimony to the power of the human mind to do such a thing, isn't it?

This passage gives us the time element of the punishment of *Gehenna*. In Mt. 23.36, Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come *upon* this generation." Not only was Jesus' generation of Jews going to experience the judgment of *Gehenna*, but in the next chapter, Jesus said it would happen *in* their generation: "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished." (Mt. 24.34)

I'm sure we're agreed that Jesus is speaking of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem, but that's precisely when the judgment of *Gehenna* took place, isn't it?

We now come to the last *Gehenna* passage, the only one not spoken by Jesus.

James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. (NAS)

Like Jesus, James uses no words like eternal, conscious, torment, or spiritual realm. He merely used *Gehenna*, which his first century Jewish audience was familiar with. He's addressing the misuse of the

tongue just like Jesus did in the first *Gehenna* passage in inspired literature, Mt. 5.22. He says their tongue can set on fire the course of their lives, and their lives are going to be set on fire by *Gehenna*.

Conclusion

We've now read the twelve *Gehenna* passages closely. Again, it was asserted: "... these twelve verses demonstrated that gehenna refers primarily (if not exclusively) to the place in the unseen spiritual realm where the souls of the unredeemed will be consciously punished forever." Did you see any evidence of that? Its author's a mighty good man, but there's not one syllable of eternal conscious torment in a spiritual state in a single one of them. Those concepts are included in the Roman Catholic concept of hell, but not at all in *Gehenna*.

False theories of eternal punishment of the wicked have done unfathomable damage in the religious realm. Untold millions of people have obeyed God purely out of fear of a false concept of hell. Other untold millions have turned their backs on God because of a false sense of hell, as described by Roman Catholic sources, and their followers in most denominations.

To sum up, Jesus threatened the Jews in the environs of Jerusalem (and no one else: not people in Ephesus, Rome, or people of our time) that they were headed for the valley named *Gehenna*. There would be unquenchable fire (Mk. 9.43) *upon* his generation (Mt. 23.36) *in* his generation (Mt. 24.34), when God threatened to destroy the souls of those of Jesus' generation after killing their bodies (Lk. 12.5, Mt. 10.28).

None of these *hell* passages say that anyone of our day can go to hell. None of them associate hell with Satan. None of them say that Satan's domain is hell. Though they speak of men being killed and destroyed in *Gehenna*, none of them speak of men being tormented there.

Ed is correct when he affirms that we shouldn't overlook the words *Gehinnom* and *Gehenna*, but neither should we blatantly read into them concepts entirely foreign to them. I appreciate very much his challenging our thinking on this subject.

P. S. The fate of the wicked in general and after AD 70 in particular is beyond the scope of this article. For longer essays on this subject, please see Chapters 14-16, "Jesus' Teaching on Hell, " "Lazarus and the Rich Man," and "Immortality and the Afterlife" in *Essays on Es-*

chatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things by Samuel G. Dawson, available at Amazon.com.

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Essays on Eschatology:
An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things

Samuel G. Dawson

598 pp with indexes

Eschatology, the study of last things, is concerned with time. Futurists believe that much of eschatology is still future. Because of the imminence statements in the gospels and epistles, preterists (including the author) believe all of the last things (the return of Christ, the judgment, and the resurrection) were all fulfilled in Jesus' generation.

This volume deals with the importance of time to God and His faithfulness in fulfillment of prophecies concerning time. Major topics discussed are the Olivet Discourse, II Peter 3, and Paul's preaching and teaching on the resurrection.

One major section of this book deals with the afterlife: Hell, the Rich Man & Lazarus, and immortality. Another deals with the faithless foundation of dispensational premillennialism. A last collection of topics includes The Importance of the Old Testament to Christians, Zionism, and Frequently-Asked Questions.

Samuel G. Dawson's books are available at Amazon.com

How to Study the Bible:

A Practical Guide to Independent Bible Study

Samuel G. Dawson

446 pages with comprehensive indexes

A tradition-challenging publication without denominational bias!

This book begins with a chapter on "Jesus` Call for Disciples" that demonstrates what it means to be a true disciple or student of God's word, rather than just a spectator sitting in a pew.

Another chapter explores "The Importance of the Old Testament to New Testament Christians," while it exposes many of our unfounded prejudices against the Old Covenant.

A great help is a list of "Old Testament Passages Quoted in the New Testament," which points us to the inspired commentary on those prophetic verses.

Also, the 42-page "Outline of the Bible" provides a valuable tool for grasping the overall view and context of the Bible and is a fascinating read in itself.

Other items of importance are a strategy for both individuals and churches to use in teaching and studying all of the books and topics of the Bible in a timely fashion and an analysis of how all of us have two reservoirs of Bible knowledge: topical and book-by-book.

When one Christian used the material to teach a class, the elders asked him to repeat the class the next year.

Although written by a serious non-denominational Bible student, preacher, and teacher of nearly 40 years, this book is not for the professional Bible scholar or theologian. It is for the independent Bible student who would like to know more of the Bible`s teaching without a denominational slant or dependence on a professional.

In recent years, the availability of helpful reference works has exploded, as have resources on the Internet. As modern Bibles and the religious world are becoming more premillennialistic and Calvinistic, the emphasis on online easy-to-use Bible aids helps today`s student remain true to God`s word-for-word inspired text. You can take advantage of these new opportunities for yourself.

This book brings the Bible to life and makes it relevant for today. Lessons progress from examining basic attitudes toward the Bible to choosing a dependable translation to rules for interpretation to dealing with difficulties in the Bible.

Samuel G. Dawson's books are available at amazon.com

Marriage, Divorce & Remarriage

The Uniform Teaching of Moses, Jesus & Paul

Samuel G. Dawson

This book brings the Bible to life and makes it relevant for today. Lessons progress from examining basic attitudes toward the Bible to choosing a dependable translation to rules for interpretation to dealing with difficulties in the Bible. Not only will you learn how to study the Bible, but you'll also come away with good, basic Bible knowledge from all the examples given in the book.

This groundbreaking material differs from others on the subject in that it proves that Moses, Jesus, and Paul all taught the same thing about divorce and remarriage. Most efforts on this issue don't deal with Moses' teaching in the Old Testament; and thus, they take Jesus' and Paul's teaching out of the context of explaining divorce and remarriage to the Jews: "men who understood the law" (Rom. 7:1). By studying the consistencies between what Moses, Jesus, and Paul taught, as one preacher explained, "Sam has finally cracked the nut on MDR." Undoubtedly, this work will aid other serious students in their quest for truth and open up new avenues for study.

THIS BOOK DEALS WITH THE ISSUES!

Is sexual intercourse a right or a condition of marriage? • In the Bible, betrothal was marriage. • What is civil government's interest in marriage? • Common-law marriage in the Bible. • Is fon-dling sexual intercourse? • Why were most adulterers in OT not stoned to death? • Is the Sermon on the Mount OT or NT teaching? • Two problems that must be worked. • What are the three ways a person can commit adultery? • Does God hate all divorce? • Is there a guilty party in Mt. 5.32 or Mt. 19.9? • Can an unjustly put-away person put away a fornicating spouse? • Four questions that lead to a solution of every situation. • Church limitations in dealing with divorce. • Fellowship. • Can a local church study these issues for itself? If not, let's not hear any more about local church autonomy.

Denominational Doctrines:
Explained, Examined, Exposed

Samuel G. Dawson
384 pages

This Book Will Help You Explore These Controversial Topics:

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Fellowship: With God and His People

The Way of Christ Without Denominationalism

Samuel G. Dawson

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Samuel G. Dawson's books are available at amazon.com

Adult Classes, Personal Evangelism, New Converts, Gifts

Christians, Churches, & Controversy:
Navigating Doctrinal & Personal Clashes

Samuel G. Dawson

An eighteenth century Scottish poet wrote concerning war: "Rash, fruitless war, from wanton glory waged, is only splendid murder."

An older preacher used this quotation when he wrote concerning a particularly brutal doctrinal attack on another elderly preacher by a group of younger, treacherous preachers. While many controversies among Christians and churches aren't this vicious, many Christians and congregations simply don't know how to navigate personal and doctrinal clashes; and thus, do more harm than good. Such situations expose some noble and naïve souls to some pretty treacherous Christians. Yet, many Christians consent to much worse than Saul did at Stephen's stoning while "consenting to his death" by just holding the coats of the stone-throwers.

Most members, whose jobs aren't even on the line, refuse to ratchet up their courage to be bothered by congregational problems and decisions. They may just want difficulties handled by the congregational leaders so they can avoid being involved. Consequently, many Christians go blithely on, consenting through ignorance to mistreatment of others that goes on behind the scenes.

This book is not for you if:

- You're not a serious student of the Bible
- Your concept of Bible study is listening to your teacher go through a quarterly class book
- Your concept of being a Christian consists mainly of "going to church"
- You depend on the preacher to do your studying for you
- You're in a denomination where all the thinking is done at the top
- You're an elder who is afraid for the congregation to study controversial subjects

Ideal for: Individual Study, Preaching, Elders

Samuel G. Dawson's books are available at amazon.com

The Teaching of Jesus

From Sinai to Gehenna: A Faithful Rabbi Urgently Warns Rebellious Israel

520 pages
Samuel G. Dawson

This Book Will Change Your View of Jesus' Teaching and the Entire New Testament as It Exposes Many of Our False Concepts

This work begins with a study of covenant concepts in the Bible, the reign of God prior to the coming of Christ, and the sophisticated expectations God has always had of non-covenant people. After demonstrating that forgiveness of sins existed under the Mosaic Law, the author develops the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus as an urgent attempt to turn the Jewish nation back to God through faithful obedience to the Mosaic Law in order to avoid imminent national destruction.

The Sermon on the Mount is viewed, not as a contrast between the Mosaic Law and the teaching of Christ, but as Jesus correctly interpreting Moses to the Jews of his day. Thus, every syllable of that sermon is Old Testament teaching. That most of that teaching is also contained in the New Covenant is demonstrated.

The parables of Jesus are then briefly analyzed, showing that each one of them is first related to the attempted reform of the Jews by Jesus. The theme of the relative importance of one's treatment of his fellowman over his formal religious service is traced throughout the Old and New Covenants. The study of *The Teaching of Jesus* concludes as Jesus concluded it, with a study of his pronouncement of imminent national destruction in Matthew 24.

Samuel G. Dawson's books are available at amazon.com

Samuel G. Dawson

A physics and mathematics graduate from Texas Tech University, Samuel G. Dawson did research in celestial mechanics and intercontinental missile guidance in the aerospace industry before preparing to preach the gospel of Christ. In twenty-two years of full time public teaching, he did extensive live call-in radio work daily for eight years and participated in a number of religious debates. Sam's scientific background has given him an inquisitive, logical, and thorough approach to the scriptures and a reputation for making Bible students re-think teaching they've taken for granted.

Sam drew on decades of experience working with local congregations to write:

Fellowship: With God and His People: The Way of Christ Without Denominationalism covers the nature of fellowship with God in the universal church and with other Christians in local churches with no denominational allegiance, since no denominations existed in the New Testament.

Denominational Doctrines: Explained, Examined, Exposed carefully documents and explains popular denominational doctrines such as Calvinism, the Sabbath Question, Dispensational Premillennialism, Modern-Day Tongue-Speaking, Indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Baptism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, and Theistic Evolution.

Marriage, Divorce, & Remarriage: The Uniform Teaching of Moses, Jesus, & Paul demonstrates how Moses, Jesus, and Paul all taught the same thing about this controversial subject, concluding with many practical solutions of unscriptural divorce and remarriage situations.

The Teaching of Jesus: From Sinai to Gehenna: A Faithful Rabbi Urgently Warns Rebellious Israel shows how many people take Jesus' teaching out of the context of the people he preached to and misapply it to our day. For instance, every syllable of the Sermon on the Mount is from the Mosaic Law, and how Jesus correctly interprets it to the Jews of his day. Most of it, but not all, of his teaching will be repeated in the New Covenant.

How to Study the Bible: A Practical Guide to Independent Bible Study, helps students be faithful students of the Scriptures, and avoid depending on professionals for their Bible knowledge.

Christians, Churches, & Controversy: Navigating Doctrinal & Personal Clashes affirms the teaching of Jesus that how we treat our fellow man is more important than our formal religious service, and how such clashes should be dealt with.

Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things affirms the Bible's teaching that "last things" are the last days of the Mosaic covenant, not the last days of history or the Christian age, which has no end. The Lord's imminent return, resurrection, and judgment are covered in the Old Testament, the gospels, and the New Testament epistles are all covered in detail.

Revelation Realized: Martyr Vindication from Genesis to Revelation covers the theme of martyr vindication from Abel, the first martyr, through Deuteronomy 32 where Moses foretells the destruction of Jerusalem for its making martyrs of the prophets, through Isaiah and others of the prophets, into the gospels, where Jesus announces further judgments on Jerusalem for martyring him, his apostles and saints in his generation, through the New Testament epistles, and finally into Revelation, where the great harlot city of spiritual Babylon, where he was crucified, was announced and carried out.

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Revelation Realized:

Martyr Vindication from Genesis to Revelation

Samuel G. Dawson

We believe you'll think this is the most common sense and understandable view of Revelation you've ever read. Dawson begins with Jesus' promise to avenge the blood of all the martyrs from Abel to Zechariah on the Jerusalem of his generation, within his generation.

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Consider copies for yourself, others, and for class study. We think you'll be glad you did!

All of Samuel G. Dawson's books are available at Amazon.com

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